

SERMONS

PREACHED Upon

Several OCCASIONS.

By ROBERT SOUTH, D.D.

V O L. II.

Containing the following SUBJECTS, *viz.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. The Practice of Religion enforced by Reason. | VII. Natural Religion, without Revelation, sufficient to render a Sinner inexcusable. |
| II. Of the superlative Love of CHRIST to his Disciples. | VIII. Of Sacramental Preparation. |
| III. Against long Extempore Prayers. | IX. Of the fatal Imposture and Force of WORDS. |
| IV. On the same Subject. | X. Prevention of Sin an unvaluable Mercy. |
| V. Of the heinous Guilt of taking Pleasure in other Mens Sins. | XI. Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience. |
| VI. On the same Subject. | XII. On the same Subject. |
-



L O N D O N:

Printed for H. LINTOT, in *Fleetstreet.*

MDCCXXXVII.



TO THE
University of Oxford.

Reverend and Learned SIRS,

THESE Discourses (most of them at least) having by the Favour of your *Patience* had the Honour of your *Audience*, and being now published in another and more lasting way, do here humbly cast themselves at your Feet, imploring the yet greater *Favour* and *Honour* of your Patronage, or at least the *Benevolence* of your Pardon.

22

A 2

Amongst

D E D I C A T I O N.

Amongst which, the chief Design of some of them is to assert the Rights and Constitutions of our excellently Reformed Church, which of late we so often hear reproached (in the modish Dialect of the present Times) by the Name of *Little Things*; and that in order to their being laid aside, not only as *Little*, but *Superfluous*. But for my own part, I can account nothing *Little* in any Church, which has the Stamp of undoubted Authority, and the Practice of primitive Antiquity, as well as the Reason and Decency of the Thing itself, to warrant and support it; though, if the supposed *Littleness* of these matters should be a sufficient Reason for the laying them aside, I fear, our Church will be found to have more *Little Men* to spare, than *Little Things*.

But

DEDICATION.

But I have observed all along, that while this *Innovating* Spirit has been striking at the *Constitutions* of our Church, the same has been giving several bold and scurvy Strokes at some of her *Articles* too: An evident Demonstration to me, that whensoever her *Discipline* shall be destroy'd, her *Doctrine* will not long survive it: And I doubt not but it is for the sake of this, that the former is so much maligned and shot at. *Pelagianism* and *Socinianism*, with several other Heterodoxies cognate to, and dependent upon them, which of late with so much Confidence, and scandalous *Countenance*, walk about daring the World, are certainly no Doctrines of the Church of *England*: And none are abler and fitter to make them appear *what they are*, and *whither they tend*, than our excellent, and

DEDICATION.

so well-stocked Universities; and if these will but bestir themselves against all Innovations whatsoever, it will quickly be seen, that our Church needs none either to fill Her Places, or to defend Her Doctrines, but the *Sons* whom she Herself has *brought forth*, and *bred up*. Her Charity is indeed great to others, and the greater, for that she is so well provided of all that can contribute either to Her Strength or Ornament without them. The *Altar* receives and protects such as fly to it, but needs them not.

We are not so dull, but we perceive who are the prime Designers, as well as the professed Actors against our Church, and from what Quarter the Blow chiefly threatens us. We know *the Spring*, as well as we observe *the Motion*, and *scent the Foot* which pursues, as well as *see the Hand* which

DEDICATION.

which is lifted up against us. The *Pope* is an experienced Workman; he knows his *Tools*, and he knows them *to be but Tools*, and he knows withal *how to use them*; and that so, that they shall neither know who it is that uses them, or what he uses them for; and we cannot in reason presume his Skill now in *Ninety-three*, to be at all less than it was in *Forty-one*. But God, who has even to a Miracle protected the Church of *England* hitherto, against all the Power and Spight both of her open and concealed Enemies, will, we hope, continue to protect so pure and rational, so innocent and self-denying a Constitution still. And next, under God, we must rely upon the Old Church of *England-Clergy*, together with the *Two Universities*, both to support and recover her declining State. For so long as the *Universities*

DEDICATION.

are sound and orthodox, the Church has *both her Eyes open*; and while she has so, 'tis to be hoped, that she will *look about her*; and consider again and again, what she is to *change from*, and what she must *change to*, and where she shall *make an End of changing*, before she quits her present *Constitution*.

Innovations about Religion are certainly the most efficacious, as well as the most plausible way of compassing a total Abolition of it. One of the best and strongest Arguments, we have against Popery, is, That it is an *Innovation* upon the Christian Church; and if so, I cannot see why that, which we explode in the *Popish Church*, should pass for such a piece of Perfection in a *Reformed One*. The Papists, I am sure, (our shrewdest and most designing Enemies) desire
and

DEDICATION.

and push on this to their utmost ; and for that very Reason, one would think, that we (if we are not besotted) should oppose it *to our utmost* too. However, let us but have our *Liturgy* continued to us, as it is, till the Persons are born, who shall be able *to mend* it, or make a *Better*, and we desire no greater Security against either the *altering This*, or *introducing Another*.

The Truth is, such as would new model the Church of *England*, ought not only to have a *New Religion*, (which some have been so long driving at) but a *New Reason* likewise, to proceed by : Since *Experience* (which was ever yet accounted one of the surest and best Improvements of Reason) has been always for acquiescing in Things settled with sober and mature Advice, (and, in the present Case
also,

DEDICATION.

also, with the very Blood and Martyrdom of the *Advisers* themselves) without running the Risque of new *Experiments* ; which, though in Philosophy they may be commendable, yet in Religion, and religious Matters, are generally fatal and pernicious. The Church is a *Royal Society* for settling *old Things*, and not for *finding out new*. In a word, we serve a *wise* and *unchangeable* God, and we deserve to do it, by a Religion, and in a Church (as like Him as may be) without *Changes*, or *Alterations*.

And now, as in so important a Matter, I would interest both Universities, so I do it with the same Honour and Deference to Both ; as abhorring from my Heart the pedantick Partiality of preferring one before the other : Since (if my Relation to One should never so much incline me so to do) I
must

DEDICATION.

must sincerely declare, that I cannot see how to place a *Preference*, where I can find no *Pre-eminence*. And therefore, as they are both equal in Fame, and Learning, and all that is Great and Excellent, so I hope to see them always one in Judgment and Design, Heart and Affection ; and without any Strife, Emulation, or Contest between them, except this One, (which I wish may be perpetual) *viz.* Which of the *Two Best Universities in the World*, shall be most serviceable to the *Best Church in the World*. by their Learning, Constancy, and Integrity.

But to conclude, There remains no more for me to do, but to beg Pardon of that August Body, to which I belong, if I have offended in assuming to myself the Honour of mentioning my Relation to a Society, which I could never reflect the least Honour upon,

DEDICATION.

upon, nor contribute the least Advantage to.

All that I can add, is, That as it was my Fortune to serve this noble Seat of Learning for many Years, as her *publick*, though unworthy *Orator*; so upon that, and other innumerable Accounts, I ought for ever to be, and to acknowledge myself,

Her most Faithful, Obedient,

and Devoted Servant,

*Westminster-Abbey,
Nov. 17, 1693.*

Robert South.

THE
Chief HEADS
OF THE
SERMONS *in* VOL. II.

SERMON I.

PROV. x. 9. *He, that walketh uprightly,
walketh surely.* Page 3

The Life of Man is in Scripture express'd by walking ; which to do surely, great Caution must be taken not to lay down false Principles, or mistake in Consequences from right ones, 3 to 5. but to walk uprightly, under the Notion of an infinite Mind governing the World, and an Expectation of another State hereafter, 4 to 6. Which two Principles will secure us in all our Actions, whether they be considered,

I. As true, *p.* 6 to 8. The Folly of a Sinner presuming upon God's Mercy, 9 to 13. Or relying upon a future Repentance, 13 to 15. Or whether supposed,

II. As

xiv *The Chief Heads of*

II. As only probable, 15 to 18. No Man, in most temporal Concerns, acts upon surer Grounds, than of Probability, 18, 19. And Self-preservation will oblige a Man to undergo a lesser Evil to secure himself from the Probability of a greater, 19, 20. Probability supposes, that a Thing may, or may not, be; both which are examin'd with relation to a Future State, 20 to 24

III. As false, 24. Under this Supposition the Virtuous walketh more surely than the Wicked, with reference to temporal Enjoyments; Reputation, 24 to 27. Quietness, 27 to 30. Health, 31 to 33. Answer to an Objection, That many Sinners enjoy all these, 33 to 35

Thence we may perceive the Folly of atheistical Persons, 35 to 39. and learn to walk uprightly, as the best Ground for our present and future Happiness, 40 to 42

S E R M O N II.

JOHN XV. 15. *Henceforth I call you not Servants; for the Servant knows not what his Lord doth; but I have called you Friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, have I made known unto you.* p. 45

The superlative Love of Christ appears in the several Degrees of his Kindness to Man, before he was created, 45, 46. when created, 46, 47. when fallen, 47, 48. whom even he not only spared, but, from the Number of Subjects, took

took into the Retinue of his Servants, and farther advanced to the Privilege of a Friend, *p.* 48 to 51. The Difference between which two Appellations is this :

I. That a Servant is for the most part,
1. Unacquainted with his Master's Designs, 51, 52. 2. Restrain'd with a degenerate Awe of Mind, 52, 53. 3. Indued with a mercenary Disposition, 53, 54

II. That a Friend is blest'd with many Privileges; as, 1. Freedom of Access, 54 to 56. 2. Favourable Construction of all Passages, 56 to 61. Sympathy in Joy and Grief, 61 to 64. 4. Communication of Secrets, 64 to 68. 5. Counsel and Advice, 68 to 71. 6. Constancy and Perpetuity, 71 to 74

In every one of which Particulars, the Excellency of Christ's Friendship shining forth, 74 to 76, we may learn the high Advantage of true Piety, 76 to 80

S E R M O N S III. and IV.

ECCLES. v. 2. *Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thine Heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth; therefore let thy Words be few.* *p.* 83 & 123

Solomon having been spoken to by God himself, and so the fittest to teach us how to speak to God, here observes to us, That when we are in God's House, we are more especially in his Presence; that this ought to create a Reverence

verence in our Addresses to him, and that this Reverence consists in the Preparation of our Thoughts, and the Government of our Expressions, 83, 84. the two great joint Ingredients of Prayer, 97, 98. Of which,

The first is, Premeditation of Thought,
85, 97, 99 to 119

The second is, Ordering of our Words by Pertinence and Brevity of Expression, 85,
86, 124 to 162

Because Prayer prevails upon God ;

Not as it does with Men, by way of Information, 85, 86. Persuasion, 86. Importunity, 87. An Objection to this last is answer'd,

94, 95

But as it is the fulfilling of that Condition, upon which God dispenseth his Blessings to Mankind, 88 to 92. An Objection to this is removed,
89 to 91

As it is most properly an Act of Dependence upon God, 93. a Dependence not natural, but moral ; for else it would belong indifferently to the Wicked as well as to the Just,

93

I. Premeditation ought to respect, 1. The Object of our Prayers ; God and his divine Perfections, 98 to 101. 2. The Matter of our Prayers, 101, 102. either Things of absolute Necessity, as the Virtues of a pious Life ; or of unquestionable Charity, as the innocent Comforts of it, 102 to 104. 3. The Order and Disposition of our Prayers, 104, 105. by excluding

cluding every thing which may seem irreverent, incoherent, and impertinent ; absurd and irrational ; rude, slight, and careless,
106, 107

Therefore all Christian Churches have governed their Publick Worship by a Liturgy, or set Form of Prayer, 108. Which way of praying is, truly,

To pray by the Spirit ; that is, with the Heart, not hypocritically ; and according to the Rules prescribed by God's holy Spirit, not unwarrantably, or by a Pretence to immediate Inspiration,
109 to 112

Not to stint, but help and enlarge the Spirit of Prayer, 113 to 115. for the Soul being of a limited Nature, can't at the same time supply two distinct Faculties to the same Height of Operation ; Words are the Work of the Brain ; and Devotion, properly the Business of the Heart, indispensably requir'd in Prayer,
114, 115

Whereas, on the contrary,

Extempore Prayers stint the Spirit, by calling off the Faculties of the Soul from dealing with the Heart both in the Minister and in the People, 113 to 115. And besides,

They are prone to encourage Pride and Ostentation, 116, 117. Faction and Sedition,
118, 119

II. Brevity of Expression, the greatest Perfection of Speech, 724 ; authoriz'd by both
VOL. II. a divine

divine, 125 to 127, and human Examples, 127 to 130: Suited best to the Modesty, 131. Discretion, 132. and Respect required in all Suppliants, 132, 133. Is still further enforced in our Addresses to God, by these Arguments, 133, 134. 1. That all the Reasons for Prolixity of Speech with Men cease to be so, when we pray to God, 134 to 141. 2. That there are but few things necessary to be pray'd for, 141 to 144. 3. That the Person who prays, can't keep up the same Fervour and Attention in a long as in a short Prayer, 144 to 146. 4. That Shortness of Speech is the most natural and lively way of expressing the utmost Agonies of the Soul, 146 to 148. 5. That we have Examples in Scripture, both of Brevity and Prolixity of Speech in Prayer, as of Brevity in the Lord's Prayer, 148, 149. the Practice of it in our Saviour himself, 150. the Success of it in several Instances; as of the Leper, of the blind Man, and of the Publican, 151, 152. Whereas the Heathens and the Pharisees, the grand Instances of Idolatry and Hypocrisy, are noted for Prolixity, 152, 153

By these Rules we may judge, 1. Of our Church's excellent Liturgy; for its Brevity and Fulness, for the frequent Opportunity of mentioning the Name and some great Attribute of God; for its alternate Responses, which thing properly denominates it a *Book of Common-Prayer*, 154 to 157. for appointing even a Form of Prayer before Sermons, 157, 158. 2. Of

2. Of the Dissenters Prayers, always notable for Length and Tautology, Incoherence and Confusion, 158 to 161

And, after this Comparison, pronounce our Liturgy the greatest Treasure of rational Devotion ; and pray God would vouchsafe long to continue to us the Use of it, 161, 162

S E R M O N V. and VI.

ROM. i. 32. *Who knowing the judgment of God (that they which commit such things, are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them, that do them, p. 165 and*
203

The Sin of taking Pleasure in other Men's Sins is not only distinct from, but also much greater than all those others mention'd in the foregoing Catalogue, 165 to 167. To arrive at which Pitch of Sinning there is a considerable Difficulty, 172. because every Man has naturally a distinguishing Sense of Good and Evil, and an inward Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction after the doing of either, and can't quickly or easily extinguish this Principle, but by another inferior Principle gratified with Objects contrary to the former, 168 to 171. And consequently no Man is quickly or easily brought to take Pleasure in his own, much less in other Men's Sins, 171, 172. Of which Sin,

I. The Causes are, 1. The Commission of the same Sins in one's own Person, 173 to 176. 2. The Commission of them against the full Conviction of Conscience, 176 to 179. 3. The Continuance in them, 179 to 183. 4. The inseparable Poor-spiritedness of Guilt, which is less uneasy in Company, 183 to 185. 5. A peculiar unaccountable Malignity of Nature, 186 to 191

II. The Reasons why the Guilt of that Sin is so great, are, 1. That there is naturally no Motive to tempt Men to it, 191 to 196. 2. That the Nature of this Sin is boundless and unlimited, 196 to 199. 3. That this Sin includes in it the Guilt of many preceding ones, 199, 200

III. The Persons guilty of that Sin are generally such as draw others to it, 204. particularly, 1. who teach Doctrines, 204 to 206. which represent sinful Actions, either as not sinful, 206 to 209. or as less sinful than they really are, 209 to 211. Censure of some modern Casuists, 211 to 213. 2. Who allure Men to Sin through formal Persuasion, or inflaming Objects, 213 to 216. 3. Who affect the Company of vicious Persons, 216 to 218. 4. Who encourage others in their Sins by Commendation, 218 to 220. or Preferment, 221, 222

Lastly, The Effects of this Sin are, 1. Upon particular Persons; that it quite depraves the natural Frame of the Heart, 222 to 224.
it

it indisposes a Man to repent of it, 224, 225. it grows the more, as a Man lives longer, 226 to 228. it will damn more surely, because many are damn'd, who never arriv'd to this pitch, 228 to 230. 2. Upon Communities of Men; that it propagates the Practice of any Sin, till it becomes national, 230. especially where great Sinners make their Dependents their Profelytes, 231. and the Follies of the Young carry with them the Approbation of the Old, 232, 233. This the Reason of the late Increase of Vice, 233, 234

S E R M O N VII.

ROM. i. 20. — *So that they are without excuse.* p. 237

The Apostle in this Epistle addresses himself chiefly to the *Jews*; but in this first Chapter he deals with the *Greeks* and *Gentiles*, 237. whom he charges with an inexcuseable Sinfulness, 238. And the Charge contains in this, and in the precedent and subsequent Verses,

I. The Sin; [*that knowing God, they did not glorify him as God*, ver. 21.] Idolatry; not that kind of one which worships that for God, which is not God; but the other, which worships the true God by the Mediation of corporeal Resemblances, 239 to 242

II. The Persons guilty of this Sin; [*such as professed themselves wise*, ver. 22.] not the Gnosticks,

Gnosticks, but the old Heathen Philosophers,

242 to 245

III. The Cause of that Sin; [*holding the Truth in Unrighteousness*, ver. 18.] 246. that the Truths, which they were accountable for, viz. 1. The Being of a God, 246. 2. That he is the Maker and Governor of the World, 246, 247. 3. That he is to be worshipped, 247, 248. 4. That he is to be worshipped by pious Practices, 248. 5. That every Deviation from Duty is to be repented of, 248. 6. That every guilty Person is obnoxious to Punishment,

248, 249

Were by them held in Unrighteousness, 1. By not acting up to what they knew, 249 to 251. 2. By not improving those known Principles into proper Consequences, 251 to 254. 3. By concealing what they knew,

254 to 259

IV. The Judgment passed upon them; [*that they were without excuse*, ver. 20.] 259 to 261. that they were unfit not only for a Pardon, but even for a Plea, 260. Because,

1. The Freedom of the Will, which they generally asserted, excluded them from the Plea of Unwillingness, 261 to 263. 2. The Knowledge of their Understanding excluded them from the Plea of Ignorance, 263 to 265

From all these we may consider,

1. The great Mercy of God in the Revelation of the Gospel,

266 to 268

2. The

2. The deplorable Condition of obstinate Sinners under it, 268 to 270

S E R M O N VIII.

MATTH. xxvii. 12. *And he saith unto him; Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment?* p. 273

The Design of this Parable, under the circumstantial Passages of a Wedding's royal Solemnity, is to set forth the free Offer of the Gospel to the *Jews* first, and, upon their Refusal, to the *Gentiles*, 273 to 275. But it may be more peculiarly applied to the holy Eucharist; which not only by Analogy, but with Propriety of Speech, and from the very Ceremony of breaking Bread, may very well be call'd a Wedding-supper, 275 to 278. to the worthy Participation whereof there is indispensably required a suitable and sufficient Preparation, 278 to 285. In which these Conditions are required;

I. That the Preparation be habitual, 286 to 290

II. That it be also actual, 290 to 293; of which the principal Ingredients are, 1. Self-examination, 294 to 297; 2. Repentance, 297 to 299; 3. Prayer, 299 to 301; 4. Fasting, 301 to 303; 5. Alms-giving, 303 to 305; 6. Charitable Temper of Mind, 305 to 307. 7. Reading and Meditation, 307

The reverend Author seem'd to have design'd another Discourse upon this Text, because in this Sermon he only dispatches the first Part, *viz.* The Necessity of Preparation ; but proceeds not to the second, *viz.* That God is a severe Animadverter upon such as partake without such a Preparation,

279

S E R M O N IX.

ISAIAH v. 20. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil,* p. 313.

[VOL. vi. Sermon. i. p. 3. Sermon. ii. p. 47.
Sermon. iii. p. 89]

Here a Woe is denounced against those, not only in particular, who judicially pronounce the Guilty innocent, and the Innocent guilty ; but, in general, who by abusing Men's Minds with false Notions, make Evil pass for Good, and Good for Evil, 313 to 317. And in the Examination of this vile Practice it will be necessary,

I. To examine the Nature of Good and Evil, what they are, and upon what they are founded, *viz.* Upon the Conformity or Unconformity to right Reason, 317 to 320. Not upon the Opinion, 320, 321. or Laws of Men, 321 to 324 ; because then, 1. The same Action under the same Circumstances might be both morally good and morally evil, 324, 325. 2. The Laws could neither be morally good nor evil, 325. 3. The same
Action

Action might be in respect of the divine Law, commanding it, morally good; and, of an human, forbidding it, morally evil,
325, 326

But that the Nature of Good and Evil is founded upon a *Jus Naturale*, antecedent to all *Jus Positivum*, may be exemplified in those two moral Duties, towards God and towards one's Neighbour,
326 to 330

II. To shew the Way, how Good and Evil operate upon Men's Minds, *viz.* by their respective Names or Appellations, 330,
331

III. To shew the Mischief arising from the Misapplication of Names, 331. For since, 1. The Generality of Men are absolutely governed by Words and Names, 332 to 339. And, 2. Chiefly in Matters of Good and Evil, 339 to 341. which are commonly taken upon trust, by reason of the frequent Affinity between Vice and Virtue, 341, 342; and of most Men's Inability to judge exactly of Things, 342 to 344. Thence may be inferr'd the comprehensive Mischief of this Misapplication, by which Man is either, 1. deceiv'd, 344 to 348; or, 2. misrepresented, 348 to
351

Lastly, To assign several Instances, wherein those mischievous Effects do actually shew themselves

[VOL. vi. p. 4 to 6

I. In Religion and Church, 6, 7. such as calling, 1. The Religion of the Church of
England,

xxvi *The Chief Heads of*

England, Popery, 7 to 10 ; which Calumny is confuted, from the Carriage of the Church of *Rome* towards the Church of *England*, 10, 11. and from the Church of *England's* denying the chief Articles of the Church of *Rome*, 11 to 20 ; 2. Schismaticks, true Protestants, 20. against whom it is prov'd, that they and the Papists are not such irreconcilable Enemies, as they pretend to be, 20 to 25. 3. The last Subversion of the Church, *Reformation*, 26 ; which mistaken Word turn'd the Monarchy into an Anarchy, 26 to 29 ; 4. The Execution of the Laws, *Persecution*, 29. by which Sophistry the great Disturbers of our Church pass for innocent, and the Laws are made the only Malefactors, 29 to 31 ; 5. Base Compliance and Half-conformity, *Moderation*, 31. both in Church Governors, 34, 35. and Civil Magistrates, 35 to 41

A terrible Instance of Pulpit-impostors seducing the Minds of Men, 46 to 49

II. In the Civil Government, 49, 56 to 58. (with an Apology for a Clergyman's treating upon this Subject, 49 to 54.) such as calling, 1. Monarchy, *Arbitrary Power*, 58 to 64. 'The Prince's Friends, *evil Counsellors*, 64 to 68 ; 3. The Enemies both of Prince and People, *Publick Spirits*, 68 to 74 ; Malicious and Ambitious Designs, *Liberty and Property*, and the *Rights of the Subject*, 74 to 80. Together with a Discovery of the

the SERMONS in VOL. II. xxvii

the several Fallacies couched under those Words, 61, 62, 67, 68, 70 to 74, 76, 77

The Necessity of reflecting frequently upon the great long Rebellion, 80 to 85

III. In private Interests of particular Persons, 94 ; such as calling, 1. Revenge, *a Sense of Honour*, 94 to 100 ; Bodily Abstinence with a demure affected Countenance, *Piety and Mortification*, 100, 101 ; Unalterable Malice, *Constancy*, 101 to 104 ; A Temper of Mind resolved not to cringe and fawn, *Pride and Morosity, and Ill-nature*, 104 to 109 ; and, on the contrary, Flattery and easy Simplicity, and Good-fellowship, *Good-nature*, 109 to 111 ; 5. Pragmatical Meddling with other Men's Matters, *Fitness for Business*, 111 to 114. Add to these, the calling Covetousness, *good Husbandry*, 115. Prodigality, *Liberality*, 115. Justice, *Cruelty* ; and Cowardice, *Mercy*, 116

A general Survey and Recollection of all that has been said on this immense Subject, 116 to 120

SERMON X.

I SAM. xxv. 32, 33. *And David said to Abigail ; Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me. And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand,*

p. 355
This

xxviii *The Chief Heads of*

This is *David's* Retraction of his Revenge resolved upon an insolent wealthy Rustick, who had most unthankfully rejected his Request with railing at his Person and Messengers, 355 to 358. From which we may,

I. Observe the Greatness of Sin-preventing Mercy, 358. Which appears, 1. From the deplorable Condition of the Sinner, before that Mercy prevents him, 359 to 365. 2. From the Cause of that Mercy, which is God's Free Grace, 365 to 367. 3. From the Danger of Sin unprevented; which will then be certainly committed; and, in such deliberate Commission, there is a greater Probability that it will not, than that it will be pardoned, 367, 368. because every Commission hardens the Soul in that Sin, and disposes the Soul to proceed farther, and 'tis not in the Sinner's Power to repent, 368 to 371. 4. From the Advantages of the Prevention of Sin above those of the Pardon of it, 371; which are the Clearness of a Man's Condition, 371 to 374. and the Satisfaction of his Mind, 374, 375

II. Make several useful Applications, 375. As, 1. To learn how vastly greater the Pleasure is upon the Forbearance, than in the Commission of Sin, 375 to 377. 2. To find out the Disposition of one's Heart by this sure Criterion, with what Ecstasy he receives a spiritual Blessing, 377 to 380. 3. To be content,

content, and thankfully to acquiesce in any Condition, and under the severest Passages of Providence, 380; with relation to Health, 380, 381. Reputation, 381, 382. and Wealth, 382 to 385

S E R M O N S XI. and XII.

I JOHN iii. 21. *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have confidence towards God.*
p. 389, and 431

It is of great Moment and Difficulty to be rationally satisfied about the Estate of one's Soul, 389: In which weighty Concern we ought not to rely upon such uncertain Rules, 390, as these: 1. The general Esteem of the World, 390 to 392. 2. The Judgment of any Casuist, 393 to 396. 3. The Absolution of any Priest, 396, 397. 4. The external Profession even of a true Religion, 398 to 402

But a Man's own Heart and Conscience, above all other Things, is able to give him Confidence towards God, 402. In order to which we must know,

I. How the Heart or Conscience ought to be informed, 403, 404. *viz.* by right Reason and Scripture, 404. and endeavouring to employ the utmost of our Ability, to get the clearest Knowledge of our Duty; and thus to come to that Confidence, which, tho' it amounts not to an infallible Demonstration, yet

yet is a rational well-grounded Hope, 405 to 409

II. By what means we may get our Heart thus informed, 409, *viz.* 1. By a careful Attention to the Dictates of Reason and natural Morality, 409 to 413. 2. By a tender Regard to every pious Motion of God's Spirit, 413 to 415. 3. By a Study of the revealed Word of God, 416 to 420. 4. By keeping a frequent and impartial Account with our Conscience, 420 to 430

With this Caution, lest either, on the one Side, every Doubting may overthrow our Confidence, 424, 425; or, on the other, a bare Silence of Conscience, raise it too much, 425 to 428

III. Whence the Testimony of Conscience is so authentick, 434. *viz.* 1. Because it is commission'd to this Office by God himself, 434 to 437. And there is examin'd the Absurdity and Impertinence, 437 to 447. the Impudence and Impiety of false Pretences of Conscience, 447; such particularly as those of schismatical Dissenters, 441 to 444, 448 to 458. who oppose the solemn Usages of our Church; the Necessity of which is founded upon sound Reason, 444, 445. 2. Because it is quick-sighted, 453 to 455. tender and sensible, 455 to 458. exactly and severely impartial, 458 to 461

IV. Some particular Instances, wherein this Confidence suggested by Conscience exerts it-

the SERMONS in VOL. II. xxxi

itself, 461, *viz.* 1. In our Addresses to God by Prayer, 461 to 463. 2. At the Time of some notable sharp Trial, 463, 464: as Poverty, 464 to 466. Calumny and Disgrace, 466, 467. 3. Above all others, at the Time of Death, 467 to 469

T H E

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Practice of RELIGION
Enforced by REASON;

I N A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

Westminster-Abbey, 1667.

VOL. II.

B

SERMON I.

The Practice of Religion enforced by Reason.

PROV. x. 9.

*He that walketh uprightly, walketh
surely.*

AS it were easy to evince, both from reason and experience, that there is a strange, restless activity in the soul of man, continually disposing it to operate, and exert its faculties; so the phrase of scripture still expresses the life of man by *walking*; that is, it represents an active principle in an active posture. And, because the nature of man carries him thus out to action, it is no wonder if the same nature equally renders him solicitous about the issue and event of his actions: for every one, by reflecting upon the way and method

4 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

thod of his own workings, will find that he is still determined in them by a respect to the consequence of what he does; always proceeding upon this Argumentation; *If I do such a thing, such an Advantage will follow from it, and therefore I will do it. And if I do this, such a Mischief will ensue thereupon, and therefore I will forbear.* Every one, I say, is concluded by this practical discourse; and for a Man to bring his actions to the event proposed, and designed by him, is *to walk surely*. But since the event of an action usually follows the nature or quality of it, and the quality follows the rule directing it, it concerns a man, by all means, in the framing of his actions, not to be deceived in the rule which he proposes for the measure of them; which, without great and exact caution, he may be, these two ways;

1. By laying false and deceitful principles.
2. In case he lays right principles, yet by mistaking in the consequences which he draws from them.

An error in either of which, is equally dangerous; for if a man is to draw a line, it is all one whether he does it by a crooked rule, or by a strait one misapplied. He who fixes upon false principles, treads upon infirm ground, and so sinks; and he who fails in his deductions
from

Serm. i. *enforced by Reason.* 5

from right principles, stumbles upon firm ground, and so falls; the disaster is not of the same kind, but of the same mischief in both.

It must be confessed, that it is sometimes very hard to judge of the truth or goodness of principles, considered barely in themselves, and abstracted from their consequences. But certainly he acts upon the surest and most prudential grounds in the world, who, whether the principles which he acts upon, prove true or false, yet secures an happy issue to his actions.

Now, he who guides his actions by the rules of piety and religion, lays these two principles as the great ground of all that he does.

I. That there is an infinite, eternal, all-wise Mind governing the affairs of the world, and taking such an account of the actions of men, as, according to the quality of them, to punish or reward them.

II. That there is an estate of happiness or misery after this life, allotted to every man, according to the quality of his actions here. These, I say, are the principles which every religious man proposes to himself; and the deduction which he makes from them, is this: that it is his grand interest, and concern, so to act and behave himself in this world, as to secure himself from an estate of misery in the other. And thus to act, is, in the phrase

6 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. I.

of scripture, *to walk uprightly*; and it is my Business to prove, that he who acts in the strength of this conclusion, drawn from the two fore-mentioned principles, *walks surely*, or secures an happy event to his actions, against all contingencies whatsoever.

And to demonstrate this, I shall consider the said principles under a threefold supposition;

1. As certainly true;
2. As probable; and,
3. As false.

And if the pious man brings his actions to an happy end, whichsoever of these suppositions his principles fall under, then certainly, there is none who *walks so surely*, and upon such irrefragable grounds of prudence, as he who is religious.

1. First of all therefore we will take these principles (as we may very well do) under the hypothesis of *certainly true*: Where, tho' the method of the ratiocination which I have cast the present discourse into, does not naturally engage me to *prove them so*, but only to shew what directly and necessarily follows upon a supposal *that they are so*; yet, to give the greater perspicuity and clearness to the prosecution of the subject in hand, I shall briefly demonstrate them thus.

It is necessary, that there should be some first mover ; and, if so, a first being ; and the first being must infer an infinite, unlimited perfection in the said being : forasmuch as if it were finite or limited, that limitation must have been either from itself, or from something else. But not from itself, since it is contrary to reason and nature, that any being should limit its own perfection ; nor yet from something else, since then it should not have been *the first*, as supposing some other thing co-evous to it ; which is against the present supposition. So that it being clear, that there must be a *first being*, and that infinitely perfect, it will follow, that all other perfection that is, must be derived from it ; and so we infer the creation of the world : And then supposing the world created by God, (since it is no ways reconcileable to God's wisdom, that he should not also govern it) creation must needs infer Providence and then, it being granted, that God governs the world ; it will follow also, that he does it by means suitable to the natures of the things he governs, and to the attainment of the proper ends of government. And moreover, man being by nature a free, moral agent, and so, capable of deviating from this duty, as well as performing it, it is necessary that he should be governed by Laws :

8 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

and since laws require that they be enforced with the sanction of rewards and punishments, sufficient to sway and work upon the minds of such as are to be governed by them; and lastly, since experience shews that rewards and punishments, terminated only within this life, are not sufficient for that purpose, it fairly and rationally follows, that the rewards and punishments, which God governs mankind by, do, and must, look beyond it.

And thus I have given a brief proof of the certainty of these principles; namely, *that there is a supreme Governor of the world; and that there is a future estate of happiness or misery for men after this life*: which principles, while a man steers his course by, if he acts piously, soberly, and temperately, I suppose there needs no farther arguments to evince, that he acts prudentially and safely; for he acts as under the eye of his just and severe Judge, who reaches to his creature a command with one hand, and a reward with the other. He spends as a person, who knows that he must come to a reckoning. He sees an eternal happiness or misery, suspended upon a few days behaviour; and therefore he lives every hour as for eternity. His future condition has such a powerful influence upon his present practice, because he entertains a continual apprehension, and a firm persuasion

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 9

persuasion of it. If a man walks over a narrow bridge, when he is drunk, it is no wonder that he forgets his caution, while he overlooks his danger. But he who is sober, and views that nice separation between himself and the devouring deep, so that if he should slip, he sees his grave gaping under him, surely must needs take every step with horror, and the utmost caution and sollicitude.

But for a man to believe it as the most undoubted certainty in the world, that he shall be judged according to the quality of his actions here, and after judgment receive an eternal recompence, and yet to take his full swing in all the pleasures of sin, is it not a greater phrenzy, than, for a man to take a purse at *Tyburn*, while he is actually seeing another hanged for the same fact? It is really to dare and defy the justice of Heaven, to laugh at *right-aiming thunderbolts*, to puff at damnation; and, in a word, to bid Omnipotence *do its worst*. He indeed, who thus walks, *walks surely*, but it is, because he is *sure* to be damned.

I confess, it is hard to reconcile such a stupid course to the natural way of the soul's acting; according to which, the will moves according to the proposals of *good* and *evil*, made
by

10 *The Practice of Religion* Setm. 1.

by the understanding : And therefore, for a man to run headlong into the bottomless pit, while the eye of a seeing conscience assures him, that it is bottomless and open, and all return from it desperate and impossible ; while his ruin stares him in the face, and the sword of vengeance points directly at his heart, still to press on to the embraces of his sin, is a problem unresolvable upon any other ground, but that sin infatuates before it destroys. For *Judas*, to receive and swallow the sop, when his master gave it him seasoned with those terrible words, *It had been good for that man, that he had never been born* : surely this argued a furious appetite, and a strong stomach ; that could thus catch at a morsel, with the fire and brimstone all flaming about it, and (as it were) digest death itself, and make a meal upon perdition.

I could wish, that every bold sinner, when he is about to ingage in the commission of any known sin, would arrest his confidence, and for a while stop the execution of his purpose, with this short question ; *Do I believe that it is really true, that God has denounced death to such a practice, or do I not ?* If he does not ; let him renounce his Christianity, and surrender back his Baptism, the water of
which

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 11

which might better serve him to cool his tongue in hell, than only to consign him over to the capacity of so black an apostacy. But if he does believe it, how will he acquit himself upon the accounts of bare reason? For, does he think, that if he pursues the means of death, they will not bring him to that fatal end? Or does he think that he can grapple with Divine Vengeance, and endure the *everlasting burnings*, or arm himself against the bites of the never-dying worm? No, surely, these are things not to be imagined; and therefore I cannot conceive what security the presuming sinner can promise himself, but upon these two following accounts:

1. That God is merciful, and will not be so severe as his *word*; and that *his threatenings of eternal torments are not so decretory and absolute, but that there is a very comfortable latitude left in them for men of skill to creep out at.* And, here it must indeed be confessed, that *Origen*, and some others, not long since, who have been so officious as to furbish up, and re-print his old errors, hold, that the sufferings of the damned are not to be, in a strict sense, *eternal*; but that, after a certain revolution, and period of time, there shall be a general gaol-delivery of the souls in prison,

12 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

prison, and that not for a *farther execution*, but a *final release*. And it must be farther acknowledged, that some of the ancients, like kind-hearted men, have talked much of annual *refrigeriums*, respites, or intervals of punishment to the damned, as particularly on the great festivals of the *Resurrection*, *Ascension*, *Pentecost*, and the like. In which, as these good men are more to be commended for their kindness and compassion, than to be followed in their opinion (which may be much better argu'd by *wishes* than *demonstrations*); so admitting that it were true, yet what a pitiful, slender comfort would this amount to? Much like the *Jews* abating the punishment of malefactors from *forty stripes*, to *forty save one*. A great indulgence indeed, even as great as the difference between *forty* and *thirty-nine*; and yet much less considerable would that indulgence be, of a few holy-days in the measures of eternity, of some hours ease, compared with infinite ages of torment.

Supposing therefore, that few sinners relieve themselves with such groundless, trifling considerations as these; yet may they not however fasten a rational hope upon the boundless mercy of God, that this may induce him to spare his poor creature, though by sin become
ob-

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 13

obnoxious to his wrath? To this I answer, That the Divine Mercy is indeed large, and far surpassing all created measures; yet nevertheless it has its proper time; and after this life it is the time of justice; and to hope for the favours of mercy then, is to expect an harvest in the dead of winter. God has cast all his works into a certain, inviolable order; according to which, there is a time to pardon, and a time to punish; and the time of one, is not the time of the other. When corn has once felt the sickle, it has no more benefit from the sun-shine. But,

2. If the Conscience be too apprehensive (as for the most part it is) to venture the final issue of things, upon a fond persuasion, that the Great Judge of the world will relent, and not execute the sentence pronounced by him; *As if he had threatened men with hell, rather to fright them from sin, than with an intent to punish them for it;* I say, if the conscience cannot find any satisfaction or support from such reasonings as these, yet may it not, at least, relieve itself with the purposes of a future repentance, notwithstanding its present actual violations of the Law? I answer, That this certainly is a confidence, of all others, the most ungrounded and irrational. For upon
what

14 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

what ground can a man promise himself a future repentance, who cannot promise himself a futurity ; whose life depends upon his breath, and is so restrained to the present, that it cannot secure to itself the reversion of the very next minute ? Have not many died with the guilt of impenitence, and the designs of repentance together ? If a man dies to day, by the prevalence of some ill humours, will it avail him that he intended to have bled and purged to morrow ?

But how dares sinful dust and ashes invade the prerogative of Providence, and carve out to himself the seasons and issues of life and death, which the *Father* keeps wholly *within his own power* ? How does that man who thinks he sins securely, under the shelter of some remote purposes of amendment, know, but that the decree above may be already passed against him, and his allowance of mercy spent ; so that the *bow in the clouds* is now drawn, and the arrow levelled at his head ; and not many days like to pass, but perhaps an apoplexy, or an impostume, or some sudden disaster may stop his breath, and reap him down as a sinner ripe for destruction ?

I conclude therefore, that, upon supposition of the *certain truth* of the principles of Religion ;

gion ; he, who *walks not uprightly*, has neither from the presumption of *God's Mercy reversing the decree of his justice*, nor from his own *purposes of a future repentance*, any sure ground to set his foot upon : but in this whole course acts as directly in contradiction to nature, as he does in defiance of grace. In a word, he is besotted, and has lost his reason ; and what then can there be for Religion to take hold of him by ? Come we now to the

2. Supposition ; under which we shew, that the principles of Religion, laid down by us, might be considered ; and that is, as *only probable*. Where we must observe, that *probability* does not properly make any alteration, either in the *truth or falsity* of things ; but only imports a different degree of their clearness, or appearance to the understanding. So that it is to be accounted *probable*, which has more and better arguments producible for it, than can be brought against it ; and surely such a thing, at least, is Religion. For certain it is, that Religion is universal, I mean *the first rudiments and general notions of Religion, call'd Natural Religion, and consisting in the acknowledgment of a Deity, and of the common principles of morality, and a future estate of souls after death*, (in which also we have all that some reformers

and

16 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

and *refiners* amongst us, would reduce Christianity itself to;) This notion of Religion, I say, has diffused itself in some degree or other, greater or less, as far as human nature extends: So that there is no nation in the world, tho' plunged into never such gross and absurd idolatry, but has some awful sense of a Deity, and a persuasion of a state of retribution to men after this life.

But now, if there are really no such things, but all is a mere lye, and a fable, contrived only to chain up the liberty of man's nature from a freer enjoyment of those things, which otherwise it would have as full a right to enjoy, as to breathe: I demand whence this persuasion could thus come to be universal? For was it ever known, in any other instance, that the whole world was brought to conspire in the belief of a lye? Nay, and of such a lye, as should lay upon men such unpleasing abridgments, tying them up from a full gratification of those lusts and appetites, which they so impatiently desire to satisfy, and consequently, by all means, to remove those impediments that might any way obstruct their satisfaction? Since therefore it cannot be made out, upon any principle of reason, how all the nations in the world, otherwise so distant in situ-

situation, manners, interests, and inclination, should by design or combination, meet in one persuasion; and withal, that men, who so mortally hate to be deceived, and imposed upon, should yet suffer themselves to be deceived by such a persuasion as is false; and not only false, but also cross and contrary to their strongest desires; so that if it were false, they would set the utmost force of their reason on work to discover that falsity, and thereby disenthral themselves: And farther, since there is nothing false, but what may be proved to be so: And yet, lastly, since all the power and industry of man's mind, has not been hitherto able to prove a falsity in the principles of religion, it irrefragably follows, (and that, I suppose, without gathering any more into the conclusion, than has been made good in the premises) that religion is, at least, a very high *probability*.

And this is that which I here contend for, that it is not necessary to the obliging men to believe religion to be true, that this truth be made out to their reason, by arguments demonstratively certain; but that it is sufficient to render their unbelief unexcusable, even upon the account of bare reason, if so be the truth of religion carry in it a much greater probability, than any of those ratiocinations

18 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

that pretend the contrary; and this I prove in the strength of these two considerations.

1. That no man, in matters of this life, requires an assurance either of the good, which he designs, or of the evil, which he avoids, from arguments demonstratively certain; but judges himself to have sufficient ground to act upon, from a probable persuasion of the event of things. No man, who first trafficks into a foreign country, has any scientifick evidence, that there is such a country, but by report, which can produce no more than a moral certainty; that is, a very high *probability*, and such as there can be no reason to except against. He who has a probable belief, that he shall meet with thieves in such a road, thinks himself to have reason enough to decline it, albeit he is sure to sustain some less (though yet considerable) inconvenience by his so doing. But perhaps it may be replied, (and it is all that can be replied) that a greater *assurance* and *evidence* is required of the things and concerns of the other world, than of the interests of this. To which I answer, that *assurance* and *evidence* (terms, by the way, extremely different; the first respecting properly the *ground* of our assenting to a thing; and the other, the *clearness* of the thing, or *object* assented to) have no place at all here,

as being contrary to our present *supposition*; according to which, we are now treating of the practical principles of religion, only as *probable*, and falling under a *probable persuasion*. And for this, I affirm, that where the case is about the hazarding an eternal, or a temporal concern, there a less degree of probability ought to engage our caution against the loss of the former, than is necessary to engage it about preventing the loss of the latter. Forasmuch, as where things are least to be put to the venture, as the eternal interests of the other world ought to be; there every, even the least probability, or likelihood of danger, should be provided against; but where the loss can be but temporal, every small probability of it need not put us so anxiously to prevent it, since though it should happen, the loss might be repaired again; or, if not, could not however destroy us, by reaching us in our greatest and highest concern; which no temporal thing whatsoever is, or can be. And this directly introduces the

2. Consideration or argument. *viz.* That bare reason, discoursing upon a principle of self-preservation (which surely is the fundamental principle which nature proceeds by) will oblige a man voluntarily, and by choice, to undergo any less evil, to secure himself but

from the probability of an evil incomparably greater, and that also, such an one, as, if that probability passes into a certain event, admits of no reparation by any after-remedy that can be applied to it.

Now, that religion teaching a future estate of souls, is a probability; and that its contrary cannot with equal probability be proved, we have already evinced. This therefore being supposed, we will suppose yet farther, that for a man to abridge himself in the full satisfaction of his appetites and inclinations, is *an evil*, because a present pain and trouble: But then it must be likewise granted, that nature must needs abhor a state of eternal pain and misery much more; and that if a man does not undergo the former less evil, it is highly probable that such an eternal estate of misery will be his portion: And if so, I would fain know whether that man takes a rational course to preserve himself, who refuses the endurance of these lesser troubles, to secure himself from a condition infinitely and inconceivably more miserable.

But since probability, in the nature of it, supposes that a thing *may*, or *may not* be so, for any thing that yet appears or is certainly determined on either side; we will here consider both sides of this probability: As,

1. That

1. That it is one way possible, that there may be no such thing as a future estate of happiness or misery, for those who have lived well or ill here; and then he, who upon the strength of a contrary belief, abridged himself in the gratification of his appetites, sustains only this evil; *viz.* That he did not please his senses, and unbounded desires, so much as otherwise he might, and would have done, had he not lived under the captivity and check of such a belief. This is the utmost which he suffers: But whether this be a real evil or no (whatsoever vulgar minds may commonly think it) shall be discoursed of afterwards.

2. But then again, on the other side, 'tis *probable* that there will be such a future estate; and then, how miserable is the voluptuous, sensual unbeliever left in the lurch? For there can be no retreat for him then, no mending of his choice in the other world, no after-game to be play'd in hell. It fares with men in reference to their future estate, and the condition upon which they must pass to it, much as it does with a merchant, having a vessel richly fraught at sea in a storm: The storm grows higher and higher, and threatens the utter loss of the ship: But there is one, and but one certain way to save it, which is, by throwing its rich lading over-board; yet still,

22 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon I.

for all this, the man knows not but *possibly* the storm may cease, and so all be preserved. However, in the mean time, there is little or no probability that it will do so; and in case it should not, he is then assured, that he must lay his life, as well as his rich commodities, in the cruel deep. Now, in this case, would this man think we act rationally, should he, upon the slender *possibility* of escaping otherwise, neglect the sure, infallible preservation of his life, by casting away his rich goods? No certainly, it would be so far from it, that should the storm, by a strange hap, cease immediately after he has thus thrown away his riches; yet the throwing them away, was infinitely more rational and eligible, than the retaining or keeping them could have been.

For a man, while he lives here in the world, to doubt whether there be any hell or no; and thereupon to live so, as if absolutely there were none; but when he dies, to find himself confuted in the flames; this surely, must be the height of woe and disappointment, and a bitter conviction of an irrational venture, and an absurd choice. In doubtful cases, reason still determines for the safer side; especially if the case be not only doubtful, but also highly concerning, and the venture be of a soul, and an eternity.

He

He who sat at a table, richly and deliciously furnished, but with a sword hanging over his head by one single thread or hair, surely had enough to check his appetite, even against all the raging of hunger, and temptations of sensuality. The only argument that could any way encourage his appetite, was, that *possibly the sword might not fall*; but when his reason should encounter it with another question, *what if it should fall?* And moreover, that pitiful stay by which it hung, should oppose the *likelihood that it would*, to a mere *possibility that it might not*; what could the man enjoy or taste of his rich banquet, with all this doubt and horror working in his mind?

Though a man's condition should be really in itself never *so safe*, yet an apprehension and surmise that it is *not safe*, is enough to make a quick and a tender reason sufficiently miserable. Let the most acute and learned unbeliever demonstrate that there is no hell: And if he can, he sins so much the more rationally; otherwise if he cannot, the case remains doubtful at least: But he who sins obstinately, does not act as if it were so much as doubtful; for if it were certain and evident to sense, he could do no more; but for a man to found a confident practice upon a disputable principle, is brutishly to out-run his reason, and to build

24 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

ten times wider than his foundation. In a word, I look upon this one short consideration (were there no more) as a sufficient ground for any rational man to take up his religion upon, and which I defy the subtlest atheist in the world solidly to answer, or confute; namely, *that it is good to be sure*. And so I proceed to the

Third and last supposition: under which the principles of religion may (for argument sake) be considered; and that is, *as false*; which surely must reach the utmost thoughts of any atheist whatsoever. Nevertheless, even upon this account also, I doubt not but to evince, that he who *walks uprightly*, *walks* much more *surely*, than the wicked and prophane liver; and that with reference to the most valued temporal enjoyments, such as are, *reputation, quietness, health*, and the like, which are the greatest which this life affords, or is desirable for. And,

1. For *reputation* or *credit*. Is any one had in greater esteem than the just person; who has given the world an assurance, by the constant tenour of his practice, that he makes a conscience of his ways? that he scorns to do an unworthy, or a base thing; to lye, to defraud, to undermine another's interest, by any sinister and inferior arts? and is there any thing,

thing, which reflects a greater lustre upon a man's person, than a severe temperance, and a restraint of himself from vicious and unlawful pleasures? Does any thing shine so bright as virtue, and that even in the eyes of those who are void of it? for hardly shall you find any one so bad, but he desires the credit of *being thought* what his vice will not let *him be*? so great a pleasure, and convenience is it, to live with honour, and a fair acceptance, amongst those whom we converse with: and a being without it, is not *life*, but rather the *skeleton* or *caput mortuum* of *life*; like time without day, or day itself without the shining of the sun to enliven it.

On the other side, is there any thing that more embitters all the enjoyments of this life, than shame and reproach? yet this is generally the lot and portion of the impious and irreligious; and of some of them more especially.

For how infamous, in the first place, is the false, fraudulent and unconscionable person? and how quickly is his character known? for hardly ever did any man of *no conscience* continue a man of *any credit* long. Likewise, how *odious*, as well as infamous, is such an one? especially, if he be arrived at that consummate, and robust degree of falshood, as to
play

26 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

play in and out, and shew tricks with *oaths*, the sacredest bonds which the conscience of man can be bound with ; how is such an one shunn'd and dreaded, like a walking pest ? what volleys of scoffs, curses, and satires, are discharged at him ? so that let never so much honour be placed upon him, it cleaves not to him, but forthwith ceases to be *honour*, by being so *placed* ; no preferment can sweeten him, but the higher he stands, the farther and wider he stinks.

In like manner, for the *drinker*, and *debauched* person : is any thing more the object of scorn and contempt, than such an one ? his company is justly look'd upon as a disgrace ; and no-body can own a friendship for him, without being an enemy to himself. A drunkard is (as it were) out-lawed from all worthy and creditable converse. Men abhor, loath, and despise, and would even spit at him as they meet him, were it not for fear that a stomach so charged, should *something* more than spit at them.

But now to go over all the several kinds of vice and wickedness, should we set aside the considerations of the *glories* of a better world, and allow this life for the only place and scene of man's happiness ; yet surely *Cato* will be always more honourable than *Clodius*, and

Cicero

Cicero than *Catiline*. Fidelity, justice, and temperance, will always draw their own reward after them, or rather carry it with them, in those marks of honour which they fix upon the persons who practise and pursue them. It is said of *David*, in 1 *Chron.* xxix. 28. *That he died full of days, riches and honour*; and there was no need of an heaven, to render him in all respects a much *happier* man than *Saul*. But in the

2. Place, the virtuous and religious person walks upon *surer grounds*, than the vicious and irreligious, in respect of the *ease, peace and quietness* which he enjoys in this world; and which certainly make no small part of human felicity. For anxiety and labour are great ingredients of that curse which sin has entail'd upon fall'n man. Care and toil came into the world with sin, and remain ever since inseparable from it, both as to its punishment and effect.

The *service* of sin is *perfect slavery*; and he who will pay obedience to the commands of it, shall find it an unreasonable task-master, and an unmeasurable exactor.

And to represent the case of some particulars; The ambitious person must rise early, and sit up late, and pursue his design with a constant, indefatigable attendance; he must be infinitely patient and servile, and obnoxious to all the
cross

28 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

cross humours of those whom he expects to rise by: he must endure and digest all sorts of affronts; adore the foot that kicks him, and kiss the hand that strikes him; while in the mean time, the humble and contented man is virtuous at a much easier rate: his virtue bids him sleep, and take his rest, while the other's restless sin bids him sit up and watch. He pleases himself innocently and easily, while the ambitious man attempts to please others sinfully, and difficultly, and perhaps, in the issue, unsuccessfully too.

The robber, and man of rapine, must run, and ride, and use all the dangerous, and even desperate ways of escape; and probably, after all, his sin betrays him to a gaol, and from thence advances him to the gibbet: but let him carry off his booty with as much safety and success as he can wish, yet the innocent person, with never so little of his own, envies him not, and, if he has nothing, fears him not.

Likewise the cheat, and fraudulent person, is put to a thousand shifts to palliate his fraud, and to be thought an honest man: but surely, there can be no greater labour, than to be always dissembling, and forced to maintain a constant disguise, there being so many ways by which a smothered truth is apt to blaze,
and

and break out; the very nature of things, making it not more natural for them *to be*, than to *appear as they be*. But he who will be really honest, just, and sincere in his dealings, needs take no pains to be thought so; no more than the sun need take any pains to shine, or when he is up, to convince the world that it is day.

And here again, to bring in the man of luxury and intemperance for his share in the pain and trouble, as well as in the forementioned shame and infamy of his vice: Can any toil, or day-labour, equal the fatigue, or drudgery, which such an one undergoes, while he is continually pouring in draught after draught, and cramming in morsel after morsel, and that in spite of appetite and nature, till he becomes a burden to the very earth that bears him; though not so great an one to that, that (if possible) he is yet a greater to himself?

And now, in the last place, to mention one sinner more, and him a notable, leading sinner indeed, to wit, the *rebel*. Can any thing have more of trouble, hazard, and anxiety in it, than the course which he takes? for in the first place, all the evils of war must unavoidably be endured, as the necessary

See the first Vol. p. 25.

means

30 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

means and instruments to compass, and give success to his traiterous designs. In which, if it is his lot to be conquered, he must expect that vengeance that justly attends a conquered, disarmed villain; for when such an one is vanquished, *his sins are always upon him*. But if, on the contrary, he proves victorious, he will yet find misery enough in the distracting cares of settling an ungrounded, odious, detestable interest, so heartily, and so justly maligned, abhorred, and oftentimes plotted against; so that, in effect, he is still *in war*, though he has acquitted the *field*. The torment of his suspicion is great, and the courses he must take to quiet his jealous, suspicious mind, infinitely troublesome and vexatious.

But, in the mean time, the labour of obedience, loyalty, and subjection, is no more, but for a man honestly and discreetly to sit still, and to enjoy what he has, under the protection of the laws. And when such an one is in his lowest condition, he is yet high and happy enough to despise and pity the most prosperous *rebel* in the world: even those famous ones of *Forty-one* (with all due respect to their flourishing relations be it spoke) not excepted. In the

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.*

31

Third and last place, the religious person *walks upon surer* grounds than the irreligious, in respect of the very *health of his body*. Virtue is a friend, and an help to nature, but it is vice and luxury that destroys it, and the diseases of intemperance are the natural product of the sins of intemperance. Whereas, on the other side, a temperate, innocent use of the creature, never casts any one into a fever, or a surfeit. Chastity makes no work for a surgeon, nor ever ends in *rottenness of bones*. Sin is the fruitful parent of distempers, and *ill lives occasion good physicians*. Seldom shall one see in cities, courts and rich families (where men live plentifully, and eat and drink freely) that perfect health, that athletic soundness and vigour of constitution, which is commonly seen in the country in poor houses, and cottages, where nature is their cook, and necessity their caterer, and where they have no other doctor, but the sun and the fresh air, and that such an one, as never sends them to the apothecary. It has been observed in the earlier ages of the church, that none lived such healthful, and long lives, as monks and hermits, who had sequestred themselves from the pleasures and plenties of the world to a constant ascetick course of the severest abstinence and devotion.

Nor

32 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

Nor is excess the only thing by which sin mauls and breaks men in their health, and the comfortable enjoyment of themselves thereby, but many are also brought to a very ill and languishing habit of body, by mere idleness; and idleness is both itself a great sin, and the cause of many more. The husbandman returns from the field, and from manuring his ground strong and healthy, because innocent and laborious; you will find no *Diet-drinks*, no *Boxes of Pills*, nor *Galley-pots*, amongst his Provisions; no, he neither *speaks* nor *lives* French, he is not *so much a Gentleman* (forsooth.) His meals are coarse and short, his employment warrantable, his sleep certain and refreshing, neither interrupted with the lashes of a guilty mind, nor the aches of a crazy body. And when old age comes upon him, it comes alone, bringing no other evil with it but itself; But when it comes to wait upon a great and worshipful finner (who for many years together has had the reputation of *eating well*, and *doing ill*) it comes (as it ought to do, to a person of such quality) attended with a long train and retinue of rheums, coughs, catarrhs, and dropsies, together with many painful girds and achings, which are at least called *the gout*. How does such an one go about, or is carried rather, with his body bending

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 33

bending inward, his head shaking, and his eyes always watering (instead of *weeping*) for the sins of his ill-spent youth ! In a word, old age seizes upon such a person, like fire upon a rotten house ; it was rotten before, and must have fallen of itself ; so that it is no more but one ruin preventing another.

And thus I have shewn the fruits and effects of sin upon men in this world. But peradventure it will be replied, that there are many sinners who escape all these calamities, and neither labour under any shame or disrepute, any unquietness of condition, or more than ordinary distemper of body, but pass their days with as great a portion of honour, ease and health, as any other men whatsoever. But to this I answer,

First, That those sinners who are in such a temporally happy condition, owe it not to their sins, but wholly to their luck, and a benign chance, that they are so. Providence often disposes of things by a method beside and above the discoveries of man's reason.

Secondly, That the number of those sinners, who by their sins have been directly plunged into all the fore-mentioned evils, is incomparably greater than the number of those, who, by the singular favour of Providence, have escaped them. And,

34 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. 1.

Thirdly, and Lastly, That, notwithstanding all this, sin has yet in itself a natural tendency to bring men under all these evils; and, if persisted in, will infallibly end in them, unless hindered by some unusual accident or other, which no man, acting rationally, can steadily build upon. It is not impossible, but a man may practise a sin secretly, to his dying-day; but it is ten thousand to one, if the practice be constant, but that some time or other it will be discovered; and then the effect of sin discovered, must be shame and confusion to the sinner. It is possible also, that a man may be an old healthful epicure; but I affirm also, that it is next to a miracle, if he be so; and the like is to be said of the several instances of sin, hitherto produced by us. In short, nothing can step between them and misery in this world, but a very great, strange, and unusual chance, which none will presume of, who *walk surely*.

And so, I suppose, that Religion cannot possibly be enforced, (even in the judgment of its best friends, and most professed enemies) by any farther arguments, than what have been produced (how much better soever the said arguments may be managed by abler hands). For I have shewn and proved, that whether the principles of it be *certain*, or but *probable*,
nay,

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 35

may, though supposed absolutely *false*; yet a man is sure of that happiness in the *practice*, which he cannot be in the *neglect* of it; and consequently, that tho' he were really a *speculative atheist*, (which there is great reason to believe, that none perfectly are) yet if he would but proceed rationally, that is, if (according to his own measures of reason) he would but *love himself*, he could not however be a *practical atheist*; nor live *without God in this world*, whether or no he expected to be rewarded by him in another.

And now, to make some application of the foregoing discourse, we may, by an easy, but sure deduction, conclude and gather from it these two things:

First, That that prophane, atheistical, epicurean rabble, whom the whole nation so rings of, and who have lived so much to the dishonour of God, the dishonour of mankind, and the disgrace of the age which they are cast upon, are not indeed (what they are pleased to think and vote themselves) the *wisest men in the world*; for in matters of choice, no man can be *wise* in any course or practice in which he is not *safe* too. But can these high affumers, and pretenders to reason, prove themselves so, amidst all those *liberties* and *latitudes* of practice which they take? Can they make

36 *The Practice of Religion* Sermon. i.

it out against the common sense and opinion of all mankind, that there is no such thing as a future estate of misery for such as have liv'd ill here? Or, can they persuade themselves, that their own particular reason, denying, or doubting of it, ought to be relied upon, as a surer argument of truth, than the universal, united reason of all the world besides, affirming it? Every fool may believe, and pronounce confidently; but wise men will, in matters of *discourse*, conclude firmly, and, in matters of *practice*, act surely: And, if these will do so too in the case now before us, they must prove it not only *probable* (which yet they can never do) but also *certain*, and past all doubt, that there is no hell, nor place of torment for the wicked; or at least, that they themselves, notwithstanding all their villainous and licentious practices, are not to be reckoned of that number and character; but that with a *non obstante* to all their revels, their *prophaneness*, and scandalous debaucheries of all sorts, they continue *Virtuoso's* still; and are that in truth, which the world in favour and *fashion* (or rather by an *antiphrasis*) is pleased to call them.

In the mean time, it cannot but be matter of just indignation to all knowing and good men, to see a company of lewd, shallow-brain'd huffs, making atheism and contempt of Religion

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 37

gion the sole badge and character of wit, gallantry, and true discretion; and then, over their pots, and pipes, claiming and engrossing all these wholly to themselves; magisterially censuring the wisdom of all antiquity, scoffing at all piety, and (as it were) new modelling the whole world. When yet, such as have had opportunity to sound these braggars throughly, by having sometimes endured the penance of their sottish company, have found them in converse so empty and insipid, in discourse so trifling and contemptible, that it is impossible but that they should give a credit and an honour to whatsoever and whomsoever they speak against: they are, indeed, such as seem wholly incapable of entertaining any design above the present gratification of their palates, and whose very soul and thoughts rise no higher than their throats; but yet withal, of such a clamorous and provoking impiety, that they are enough to make the nation like *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* in their punishment, as they have already made it too like them in their sins. Certain it is, that blasphemy and irreligion have grown to that daring height here of late years, that had men in any sober, civilized heathen nation, spoke or done half so much in contempt of their false gods

38 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. I.

and religion, as some in our days and nation, wearing the name of Christians, have spoke and done against God and Christ, they would have been infallibly burnt at a stake, as monsters and publick enemies of society.

The truth is, the persons here reflected upon, are of such a peculiar stamp of impiety, that they seem to be a set of fellows got together, and formed into a kind of *diabolical society*, for the finding out *new experiments* in vice; and therefore they laugh at the dull, unexperienced, obsolete sinners of former times; and scorning to keep themselves within the common, beaten *broad way to hell*, by being vicious only at the low rate of *example* and *imitation*, they are for searching out other *ways and latitudes*, and obliging posterity with unheard-of inventions and discoveries in sin; resolving herein to admit of no other measure of *good* and *evil*, but the judgment of *sensuality*; as those who prepare matters to their hands, allow no other measure of the philosophy and truth of things, but the sole *judgment of sense*. And these (forsooth) are our great sages, and those who must pass for the only shrewd, thinking and inquisitive men of the age; and such as by a long, severe, and profound speculation of nature, have redeemed themselves from the
pedan-

pedantry of being conscientious, and living virtuously, and from such old-fashion'd *principles* and *creeds*, as tie up the minds of some *narrow-spirited, uncomprehensive* zealots, who *know not the world*, nor understand, that he only is the truly *wise man*, who, *per fas, & nefas*, gets as much as he can.

But, for all this, let atheists and sensualists satisfy themselves as they are able; the former of these will find, that as long as reason keeps her ground, Religion neither can, nor will lose hers. And for the sensual epicure, he also will find, that there is a certain *living spark* within him, which all the drink he can pour in, will never be able to *quench* or put out; nor will his rotten abused body have it in its power to convey any putrifying, consuming, rotting quality to the soul: No, there is no *drinking*, or *swearing*, or *ranting*, or *fluxing* a soul out of its *immortality*. But that must and will survive and abide, in spite of death and the grave; and live for ever, to convince such wretches, to their eternal woe, that the so much repeated ornament and flourish of their former speeches, (*God damn 'em*) was commonly the truest word they spoke, though least believed by them, while they spoke it.

40 *The Practice of Religion* Serm. 1.

2. The other thing deducible from the foregoing particulars, shall be to inform us of the way of attaining to that excellent privilege, so justly valued by those who have it, and so much talk'd of by those who have it not; which is, *assurance*. *Assurance* is properly that persuasion or confidence, which a man takes up of the pardon of his sins, and his interest in God's favour, upon such grounds and terms, as the Scripture lays down. But now, since the Scripture promises eternal happiness and pardon of sin, upon the sole condition of faith, and sincere obedience, it is evident, that he only can plead a title to such a pardon, whose conscience impartially tells him, that he has performed the required condition. And this is the only rational *assurance*, which a man can, with any safety, rely or rest himself upon.

He who in this case would *believe surely*, must first *walk surely*; and to do so, is to *walk uprightly*. And what that is, we have sufficiently mark'd out to us, in those plain and legible lines of duty, requiring us to demean ourselves to God humbly and devoutly; to our governors obediently; and to our neighbours justly; and to ourselves soberly and temperately. All other pretences being infinitely
vain

Serm. 1. *enforced by Reason.* 41

vain in themselves, and fatal in their consequences.

It was indeed the way of many in the late times, to bolster up their crazy, doating consciences, with (I know not what) odd confidences, founded upon inward *whispers of the spirit, stories of something which they called conversion, and marks of predestination*: All of them (as they understood them) mere delusions, trifles, and fig-leaves; and such as would be sure to fall off and leave them naked, before that fiery tribunal, which knows no other way of *judging* men, but according to their works.

Obedience and *upright walking* are such substantial, vital parts of Religion, as, if they be wanting, can never be made up, or commuted for by any formalities of phantastick looks or language. And the great question, when we come hereafter to be judged, will not be, *How demurely have you looked?* or, *How boldly have you believed?* *With what length have you prayed?* and, *With what loudness and vehemence have you preached?* but, *How holily have you lived?* and, *How uprightly have you walked?* For this, and this only, (with the merits of Christ's righteousness) will come into account, before that great Judge,
who

who will pass sentence upon every man according to what he has done here in the flesh, whether it be good, or whether it be evil; and there is no respect of persons with him.

*To whom therefore be render'd and ascribed,
as is most due, all praise, might, majesty,
and dominion, both now and for evermore,
Amen.*

Of the Superlative Love of CHRIST
to his Disciples.

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

UNIVERSITY,

A T

CHRIST-CHURCH, *Oxon*, 1664.

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
PRESS

SERMON II.

Of the Love of CHRIST to
his Disciples.

JOHN XV. 15.

*Henceforth I call you not Servants ; for
the Servant knows not what his Lord
doth : But I have called you Friends ;
for all things that I have heard of
my Father, have I made known unto
you.*

WE have here an account of Christ's
friendship to his disciples ; that is,
we have the best of things represented in the
greatest of examples. In other men we see
the excellency, but in Christ the divinity of
friendship. By our baptism and church-
com-

46 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon 2.

communion, we are made *one body* with Christ ; but by this we become *one soul*.

Love is the greatest of human affections, and friendship is the noblest and most refin'd improvement of love ; a quality of the largest compass. And it is here admirable to observe the ascending gradation of the love, which Christ bore to his disciples. The strange and superlative greatness of which will appear from those several degrees of kindness that it has manifested to man, in the several periods of his condition. As,

1. If we consider him antecedently to his creation ; while he yet lay in the barren womb of nothing, and only in the number of possibilities ; and consequently, could have nothing to recommend him to Christ's affection, nor shew any thing lovely, but what he should afterwards receive from the stamp of a preventing love : Yet even then did the love of Christ begin to work, and to commence in the first emanations and purposes of goodness towards man ; designing to provide matter for itself to work upon, to create its own object, and, like the sun, in the production of some animals, first to give a being, and then to shine upon it.

2. Let us take the love of Christ as directing itself to man actually created, and brought
into

into the world ; and so all those glorious endowments of human nature, in its original state and innocence, were so many demonstrations of the munificent goodness of him, *by whom God first made*, as well as afterwards *redeemed the world*. There was a consult of the whole Trinity for the making of man, that so he might shine as a master-piece, not only of the art, but also of the kindness of his Creator ; with a noble and a clear understanding, a rightly disposed will, and a train of affections regular, and obsequious, and perfectly conformable to the dictates of that high and divine principle *right reason*. So that, upon the whole matter, he stepped forth, not only the work of God's hands, but also the copy of his perfections ; a kind of image or representation of the Deity in *small* ; Infinity contracted into flesh and blood ; and (as I may so speak) the prelude, and first essay towards the Incarnation of the divine nature. But,

3. And *Lastly*, Let us look upon man, not only as created, and brought into the world, with all these great advantages superadded to his being ; but also, as depraved, and fallen from them ; as an out-law, and a rebel, and one that could plead a title to nothing, but to the highest severities of a sin-revenging justice.

Yet

48 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 1.

Yet even in this estate also, the boundless love of Christ began to have warm thoughts and affections towards so wretched a creature; at this time not only not amiable, but highly odious.

While indeed man was yet uncreated and unborn, though he had no positive perfection to present, and set him off to Christ's view; yet he was at least negatively clear: And, like unwritten paper, though it has no draughts to entertain, yet neither has it any blots to offend the eye; but is white, and innocent, and fair for an after-inscription. But man, once fallen, was nothing, but a great blur; nothing but a total universal pollution, and not to be reformed by any thing under a new creation.

Yet, see here the ascent, and progress of Christ's love: for first, if we consider man in such a loathsome, and provoking condition; was it not love enough, that he was spared and permitted to enjoy a being? since, not to put a traitor to death, is a singular mercy. But then, not only to continue his being, but to adorn it with privilege, and from the number of *subjects* to take him into the retinue of *servants*, this was yet a greater love. For every one that may be fit to be tolerated in a prince's dominions, is not therefore fit to be admitted

admitted into his family; nor is any prince's court to be commensurate to his kingdom. But then farther, to advance him from a *servant* to a *friend*; from only living in his house, to lying in his bosom; this is an instance of favour above the rate of a created goodness, an act for none but the Son of God, who came to do every thing in *miracle*, to love super-naturally, and to pardon infinitely, and even to lay down the Sovereign, while he assumed the Saviour.

The text speaks the winning behaviour, and gracious condescension of Christ to his disciples, in owning them for his *friends*, who were more than sufficiently honoured by being his *servants*. For still these words of his must be understood, not according to the bare rigour of the letter, but according to the arts and allowances of expression: not as if the relation of *friends* had actually discharged them from that of *servants*; but that of the two *relations*, Christ was pleased to over-look the meaner, and without any mention of that, to entitle and denominate them solely from the more honourable.

For the farther illustration of which, we must premise this, as a certain and fundamental truth, that so far as service imports duty and subjection, all created beings, whe-

ther men or angels, bear the necessary and essential relation of *servants* to God, and consequently to Christ, who is *God blessed for ever* : And this relation is so necessary, that God himself cannot dispense with it, nor discharge a rational creature from it ; for altho' consequentially indeed he may do so, by the annihilation of such a creature, and the taking away his being ; yet, supposing the continuance of his being, God cannot effect, that a creature which has his being from, and his dependence upon him, should not stand obliged to do him the utmost service that his nature enables him to do. For, to suppose the contrary, would be irregular and opposite to the law of nature, which, consisting in a fixed unalterable relation of one nature to another, is, upon that account, even by God himself, indispensable : Forasmuch as having once made a creature, he cannot cause that *that creature* should not owe a natural relation to his Maker, both of subjection and dependence, (the very essence of a creature importing so much) to which relation if he behaves himself unsuitably, he goes contrary to his nature, and the laws of it ; which God, the author of nature, cannot warrant without being contrary to himself. From all which it follows, that even in our highest estate of sanctity

sanctity and privilege, we yet retain the unavoidable obligation of *Christ's servants*; tho' still with an advantage as great as the obligation, where *the service is perfect freedom*: So that with reference to such a Lord, *to serve*, and *to be free*, are terms not consistent only, but absolutely equivalent.

Nevertheless, since the name of *servants* has of old been reckoned to imply a certain meanness of mind, as well as lowness of condition, and the ill qualities of many who served, have rendered the condition itself not very creditable; especially in those ages, and places of the world, in which the condition of servants was extremely different from what it is now amongst us; they being generally slaves, and such as were bought and sold for money, and consequently reckon'd but amongst the other goods and chattels of their lord, or master: It was for this reason, that Christ thought fit to wave the appellation of *servant* here, as, according to the common use of it amongst the *Jews*, (and, at that time, most nations besides) importing these three qualifications, which, being directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity, were by no means to be allowed in any of Christ's disciples.

1. The first whereof is that here mention'd in the text; *viz.* an utter unacquaintance

52 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

with his master's designs in these words; *The servant knows not what his lord doth.* For seldom does any man of sense make his servant his *counsellor*, for fear of making him his *governour* too. A master for the most part keeps his choicest goods lockt up from his servant, but much more his mind. A servant is to know nothing but his master's commands; and in these also not to know the reason of them.

Neither is he to stand aloof off from his counsels only, but sometimes from his presence also; and, so far as decency is duty, it is sometimes his duty to avoid him. But the voice of Christ in his gospel is, *Come to me, all ye that are heavy laden.* The condition of a servant staves him off to a distance; but the gospel speaks nothing but allurements, attractions, and invitation. *The magisterial Law* bids the person under it, *Go, and he must go*: But the Gospel says to every believer, *Come, and he cometh.* A servant dwells remote from all knowledge of his lord's purposes, he lives as a kind of foreigner under the same roof; a *domestick*, and yet a *stranger* too.

2. The name of servant imports a slavish and degenerate awe of mind; as it is in *Rom. viii. 5.* *God has not given us the spirit of bondage again to fear.* He who serves has
still

still the low and ignoble restraints of dread upon his spirit; which in business, and even in the midst of action, cramps and ties up his activity. He fears his master's anger, but designs not his favour. *Quicken me* (says David) *with thy free spirit*. It is the *freedom* of the *spirit* that gives worth and life to the performance. But a servant commonly is less free in mind than in condition; his very will seems to be in bonds and shackles, and desire itself under a kind of durance and captivity. In all that a servant does he is scarce a voluntary agent, but when he serves himself: All his services otherwise, not flowing naturally from propensity and inclination, but being drawn and forced from him by terror and coercion. In any work he is put to, let the master withdraw his *eye*, and he will quickly take off his *band*.

3. The appellation of *servant* imports a mercenary temper and disposition; and denotes such an one, as makes his reward both the sole motive and measure of his obedience. He neither loves the thing commanded, nor the person who commands it, but is wholly and only intent upon his own emolument. All kindnesses done him, and all that is given him over and above what is strictly *just* and his *due*, makes him rather worse than better. And

54 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

this is an observation that never fails, where any one has so much bounty, or so little wit, as to make the experiment. For a servant rarely or never ascribes what he receives, to the mere liberality and generosity of the donor, but to his own worth and merit, and to the need which he supposes there is of him; which opinion alone will be sure to make any one of a mean servile spirit, insolent and intolerable.

And thus I have shewn what the qualities of a servant usually are (or, at least, were in that country, where our Saviour lived and conversed, when he spake these words) which, no doubt, were the cause when he would not treat his disciples (whom he designed to be of a quite contrary disposition) with this appellation.

Come we therefore now, in the next place, to shew what is included in that great character and privilege which he was pleased to vouchsafe both to them, and to all believers, in calling and accounting them his *friends*. It includes in it (I conceive) these following things.

1. Freedom of access. House and heart, and all are open for the reception of a friend. The entrance is not beset with solemn excuses and lingring delays; but the passage is easy, and free from all obstruction, and not only admits, but even invites the comer. How different,

ferent, for the most part, is the same man from himself, as he sustains the person of a magistrate, and as he sustains that of a friend! As a magistrate or great officer he locks himself up from all approaches by the multiply'd formalities of attendance, by the distance of ceremony and grandeur; so many hungry officers to be pass'd through, so many thresholds to be saluted, so many days to be spent in waiting for an opportunity of, perhaps, but half an hour's converse.

But when *he* is to be entertain'd, whose friendship, not whose business demands an entrance; those formalities presently disappear, all impediments vanish, and the rigors of the magistrate, submit to the endearments of a friend. He opens and yields himself to the man of business with difficulty and reluctancy, but offers himself to the visits of a friend with facility, and all the meeting readiness of appetite and desire. The reception of one is as different from the admission of the other, as when the earth falls open under the incisions of the plough, and when it gapes and greedily opens itself to drink in the dew of heaven, or the refreshments of a shower: Or, there is as much difference between them, as when a man reaches out his arms to take up a burthen, and when he reaches them out to embrace.

56 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

'Tis confessed, that the vast distance, that sin had put between the offending creature, and the offended Creator, required the help of some great umpire, and intercessor, to open him a new way of access to God; and this Christ did for us as Mediator. But we read of no mediator to bring us to Christ; for tho', being God by nature, he dwells in the height of majesty, and the inaccessible glories of a Deity; yet to keep off all strangeness between himself, and the sons of men, he has condescended to a cognation and consanguinity with us, he has cloathed himself with *flesh* and *blood*, that so he might subdue his glories to a possibility of human converse. And therefore, he that denies himself an immediate access to Christ, affronts him in the great relation of a friend; and as opening himself both to our persons, and to our wants, with the greatest tenderness, and the freest invitation. There is none who acts a friend by a deputy, or can be familiar by proxy.

2. The second privilege of friendship is a favourable construction of all passages between friends, that are not of so high, and so malign a nature, as to dissolve the relation. *Love covers a multitude of sins*, says the *Apostle*, 1 *Pet.* iv. 8. When a scar cannot be taken away, the next kind office is to hide it. *Love* is

is never so *blind*, as when it is to spy faults. It is like the painter, who being to draw the picture of a friend having a blemish in one eye, would picture only another side of his face. It is a noble, and a great thing to cover the blemishes, and to excuse the failings of a friend; to draw a curtain before his stains, and to display his perfections; to bury his weaknesses in silence, but to proclaim his virtues upon the house-top. It is an imitation of the charities of heaven, which, when the creature lies prostrate in the weakness of sleep and weariness, spreads the covering of night and darkness over it, to conceal it in that condition: But as soon as our spirits are refresh'd, and nature returns to its morning vigour, God then bids the sun rise, and the day shine upon us, both to advance and to shew that activity.

It is the ennobling office of the understanding, to correct the fallacious and mistaken reports of sense, and to assure us that the staff in the water is strait, though our eye would tell us it is crooked. So it is the excellency of friendship to rectify, or at least to qualify the malignity of those surmises, that would misrepresent a friend, and traduce him in our thoughts. Am I told that my friend has done me an injury, or that he has committed any unde-

58 *Of the Love of* CHRIST *Serm. 2.*

undecent action? Why, the first debt that I both owe to his friendship, and that he may challenge from mine, is rather to question the truth of the report, than presently to believe my friend unworthy. Or, if matter of fact breaks out and blazes with too great an evidence to be denied, or so much as doubted of; why, still there are other lenitives, that friendship will apply, before it will be brought to the decretory rigours of a condemning sentence. A friend will be sure to act the part of *an advocate*, before he will assume that of *a judge*. And there are few actions so ill, (unless they are of a very deep and black tincture indeed) but will admit of some extenuation, at least from those common topicks of human frailty; such as are ignorance or inadvertency, passion or surprize, company or sollicitation, with many other such things, which may go a great way towards an excusing of the *agent*, tho' they cannot absolutely justify the *action*. All which apologies for, and alleviations of faults, though they are the heights of humanity, yet they are not the favours, but the duties of friendship. Charity itself commands us, where we know no ill, to think well of all. But friendship, that always goes a pitch higher, gives a man a peculiar right and claim to the good opinion of his friend. And, if

we

we justly look upon a proneness *to find faults*, as a very ill and a mean thing, we are to remember, that a proneness *to believe them* is next to it.

We have seen here the demeanor of friendship between man and man: But how is it, think we now, between Christ, and the soul that depends upon him? Is he any ways short in these offices of tenderness and mitigation? No, assuredly; but by infinite degrees superior. For where our heart does but *relent*, his *melts*; where our eye pities, his bowels yearn. How many frowardnesses of ours does he smother, how many indignities does he pass by, and how many affronts does he put up at our hands, because his love is invincible, and his friendship unchangeable? He rates every action, every sinful infirmity, with the allowances of mercy; and never weighs the sin, but together with it he weighs the force of the inducement; how much of it is to be attributed to choice, how much to the violence of the temptation, to the stratagem of the occasion, and the yielding frailties of weak nature.

Should we try men, at that rate, that we try Christ, we should quickly find, that the largest stock of human friendship would be too little for us to spend long upon. But his
com-

60 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon 2.

compassion follows us with an infinite supply. He is God in his *friendship*, as well as in his *nature*, and therefore we sinful creatures are not took upon advantages, nor consumed in our provocations.

See this exemplified in his behaviour to his disciples, while he was yet upon earth: How ready was he to excuse and cover their infirmities! At the last and bitterest scene of his life, when he was so full of agony and horror upon the approach of a dismal death, and so had most need of the refreshments of society, and the friendly assistance of his disciples; and when also he desired no more of them, but only for a while to sit up and pray with him: yet they, like persons wholly untouched with his agonies, and unmoved with his passionate entreaties, forget both his and their own cares, and securely sleep away all concern for him, or themselves either. Now, what a fierce, and sarcastick reprehension may we imagine this would have drawn from the friendships of the world, that act but to an human pitch! and yet what a gentle one did it receive from Christ! in *Matt. xxvi. 40.* no more than, *What, could you not watch with me for one hour?* And when from this admonition they took only occasion to redouble their fault, and to sleep again, so that upon a second and third admo-

admonition they had nothing to plead for their unseasonable drowfiness, yet then Christ, who was the only person concerned to have reſented, and aggravated this their unkindness, finds an extenuation for it, when they themselves could not: *The Spirit indeed is willing* (ſays he), *but the flesh is weak*. As if he had ſaid, I know your hearts, and am ſatisfied of your affection, and therefore accept your will, and compaſſionate your weakness. So benign, ſo gracious is the friendship of Christ, ſo answerable to our wants, ſo ſuitable to our frailties. Happy that man, who has a friend to point out to him the perfection of duty, and yet to pardon him in the lapses of his infirmity.

3. The third privilege of friendship is a sympathy in *joy* and *grief*. When a man ſhall have diffuſed his life, his ſelf, and his whole concernments ſo far, that he can weep his ſorrows with another's eyes; when he has another heart beſides his own, both to ſhare, and to ſupport his griefs, and when, if his joys overflow, he can treasure up the overplus and redundancy of them in another breaſt; ſo that he can (as it were) ſhake off the ſolitude of a ſingle nature, by dwelling in two bodies at once, and living by another's breath; this ſurely,

62 *Of the Love of* CHRIST Sermon. 2.

surely, is the height, the very spirit and perfection of all human felicities.

It is a true and happy observation of that great philosopher the Lord *Verulam*, that this is the benefit of communication of our minds to others, *That sorrows by being communicated grow less, and joys greater.* And indeed sorrow, like a stream, loses itself in many channels; and joy, like a ray of the sun, reflects with a greater ardour and quickness when it rebounds upon a man from the breast of his friend.

Now friendship is the only scene upon which the glorious truth of this great proposition can be fully acted and drawn forth. Which indeed is a summary description of the sweets of friendship; and the whole life of a friend, in the several parts and instances of it, is only a more diffuse comment upon, and a plainer explication of this divine aphorism. Friendship never restrains a pleasure to a single fruition: But such is the royal nature of this quality, that it still expresses itself in the style of kings, as *We do this*, or that; and this is *our* happiness; and such or such a thing belongs *to us*; when the immediate possession of it is vested only in one. Nothing certainly in nature, can so peculiarly gratify the noble
dis-

dispositions of humanity, as for one man to see another so much himself, as to sigh his griefs, and groan his pains, to sing his joys, and (as it were) to do and feel every thing by sympathy, and secret inexpressible communications. Thus it is upon an human account.

Let us now see, how Christ sustains and makes good this generous quality of a friend. And this we shall find fully set forth to us, in *Heb. iv. 15.* where he is said to be a *merciful High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and that in all our afflictions he is afflicted*, *Isa. lxiii. 9.* And no doubt, with the same bowels and meltings of affection, with which any tender mother hears and bemoans the groanings of her sick child, does Christ hear and sympathize with the spiritual agonies of a soul under desertion, or the pressures of some stinging affliction. It is enough that he understands the exact measures of our strengths and weaknesses; that *he knows* our frame; as it is in *Psal. ciii. 14.* And that he does not only know, but emphatically, that he *remembers* also *that we are but dust*: Observe that signal passage of his loving commiseration; as soon as he had risen from the dead, and met *Mary Magdalene*, in *Mark xvi. 7.* he sends this message of his Resurrection by her: *Go, tell my disciples and Peter, that I am risen.*

What!

64 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

What! was not *Peter* one of his disciples? Why then is he mentioned particularly and by himself, as if he were exempted out of their number? Why, we know into what a plunge he had newly cast himself by denying his Master; upon occasion of which he was now struggling with all the perplexities and horrors of mind imaginable, lest Christ might, in like manner, deny and disown him *before his Father*, and so repay one denial with another. Hereupon Christ particularly applies the comforts of his Resurrection to him, as if he had said, *Tell all my disciples*, but be sure especially to tell poor *Peter*, *that I am risen from the dead*; and that, notwithstanding his denial of me, the benefits of my Resurrection belong to him, as much as to any of the rest. This is the privilege of the saints, to have a companion and a supporter in all their miseries, in all the doubtful turnings and doleful passages of their lives. In sum, this happiness does Christ vouchsafe to all his, that as a *Saviour* he once suffered for them, and that as a *friend*, he always *suffers with them*.

4. The fourth privilege of friendship is that which is here specified in the text, a communication of secrets. A bosom-secret and a bosom-friend are usually put together. And this from Christ to the soul, is not only kindness,

ness, but also honour and advancement? 'tis for him to vouch it one of his privy-council. Nothing under a jewel is taken into the cabinet. A secret is the apple of our eye; it will bear no touch, nor approach; we use to cover nothing, but what we account a rarity. And therefore to communicate a secret to any one, is to exalt him to one of the royalties of heaven: For none knows the secrets of a man's mind, but his God, his conscience, and his friend. Neither would any prudent man let such a thing go out of his own heart, had he not another heart besides his own to receive it.

Now it was of old a privilege, with which God was pleased to honour such as served him at the rate of an extraordinary obedience, thus to admit them to a knowledge of many of his great counsels lock'd up from the rest of the world. When God had designed the destruction of *Sodom*, the Scripture represents him as unable to conceal that great purpose from *Abraham*, whom he always treated as *his friend*, and acquaintance; that is, not only with love, but also with intimacy and familiarity, in *Gen. xviii. ver. 17. And the Lord said, shall I bide from Abraham the thing that I go about to do?* He thought it a violation of the rights of friendship to reserve his design

66 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

wholly to himself. And St. *James* tells us, in *Jam. ii. 23.* *that Abraham was called the friend of God*: And therefore had a kind of claim to the knowledge of his secrets, and the participation of his counsels. Also in *Exodus xxxiii. 11.* it is said of God, *that he spoke to Moses as a man speaketh to his friend.* And that, not only for the familiarity and facility of address, but also for the peculiar communications of his mind. *Moses* was with him in the retirements of the mount, received there his dictates, and his private instructions, as his deputy and viceroy; and when the multitude and congregation of *Israel* were thundered away, and kept off from any approach to it, he was honoured with an intimate and immediate admission. The priests indeed were taken into a near attendance upon God; but still there was a degree of a nearer converse, and the interest of a friend was above the privileges of the highest servant. In *Exod. xix. 24.* *Thou shalt come up, (says God) thou and Aaron with thee; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest the Lord break forth upon them.* And if we proceed further, we shall still find a continuation of the same privilege: *Psal. xxv. 14.* *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.* Nothing is to be concealed from the other self.

To

To be a friend, and to be conscious, are terms equivalent.

Now if God maintained such intimacies with those, whom he loved, under the *Law*, (which was a dispensation of greater distance) we may be sure that, under the *Gospel*, (the very nature of which imports condescension, and compliance) there must needs be the same with much greater advantage. And therefore when *God had manifested himself in the flesh*, how sacredly did he preserve this privilege? How freely did Christ unbosom himself to his disciples? in *Luke viii. 10. Unto you* (says he) *it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: But unto others in parables; that seeing they might not see:* Such shall be permitted to cast an eye into the Ark, and to look into the very *Holy of Holies*. And again in *Matth. xiii. 17. Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* Neither did he treat them with these peculiarities of favour in the extraordinary discoveries of the Gospel only, but all of those incommunicable revelations of the divine love, in reference to their own personal interest in it. In *Rev. ii. 17. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white*

68 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it. Assurance is a rarity covered from the inspection of the world. A secret that none can know, but God, and the person that is blessed with it. It is writ in a private character, not to be read, nor understood but by the conscience, to which the spirit of God has vouchsafed to decypher it. Every believer lives upon an inward provision of comfort, that the world is a stranger to.

5. The fifth advantage of friendship is *counsel and advice*. A man will sometimes need not only another *heart*, but also another *head* besides his own. In solitude there is not only discomfort, but weakness also: and that saying of the wise man, *Eccles. iv. 10. Woe to him that is alone*, is verified upon none so much, as upon the friendless person. When a man shall be perplex'd with knots and problems of business and contrary affairs; where the determination is dubious, and both parts of the contrariety seem equally weighty, so that which way soever the choice determines, a man is sure to venture a great concern; how happy then is it to fetch in aid from another person, whose judgment may be greater than my own, and whose concernment is sure not to be less! There are some passages of a man's affairs that
would

would quite break a single understanding : So many intricacies, so many labyrinths, are there in them, that the succours of reason fail, the very force and spirit of it being lost in an actual intention scattered upon several clashing objects at once ; in which case the interposal of a friend is like the supply of a fresh party to a besieged, yielding city.

Now Christ is not failing in this office of a friend also. For in that illustrious prediction of *Isa. ix. 6.* amongst the rest of his great titles, he is called *Mighty Counsellor*. And his counsel is not only sure, but also free. It is not under the gospel of Christ, as under some laws of men, where you must be forced to buy your counsel, and oftentimes pay dear for bad advice. No, *He is a light to those that sit in darkness*. And no man fees the sun, no man purchases the light, nor errs, if he walks by it. The only price that Christ sets upon his counsel is, that we follow it ; and that we do that, which is best for us to do. He is not only light for us to see *by*, but also *light* for us to see *with*. He is *understanding to the ignorant*, and *eyes to the blind* : And whosoever has both a faithful and a discrete friend, to guide him in the dark, slippery, and dangerous passage of his life, may carry his eyes in another man's head, and yet see never the worse.

70 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

In 1 Cor. i. 30. the apostle tells us, that Christ is made to us, not only *sanctification and redemption*, but *wisdom* too: We are his members, and it is but natural, that all the members of the body should be guided by the wisdom of the head.

And therefore let every believer comfort himself in this high privilege, that in the great things, that concern his eternal peace, he is not left to stand or fall by the uncertain directions of his own judgment. No, sad were his condition if he should be so, when he is to encounter an enemy made up of wiles and stratagems, an old serpent, and a long experienc'd deceiver, and successful at the trade for some thousands of years.

The inequality of the match, between such an one, and the subtlest of us, would quickly appear by a fatal circumvention: There must be a *wisdom from above* to over-reach and master this hellish wisdom *from beneath*. And this every sanctified person is sure of in his great Friend, *in whom all the treasures of wisdom dwell*. Treasures that flow out, and are imparted freely both in direction and assistance to all that belong to him. He never leaves any of *his* perplexed, amazed, or bewildered, where the welfare of their souls requires a better judgment than their own, either to
guide

guide them in their duty, or to disentangle them from a temptation. Whosoever has Christ for his friend, shall be sure of counsel, and whosoever is his own friend, will be sure to obey it.

6. The last and crowning privilege, or rather property of friendship, is *constancy*. He only is a friend whose friendship lives as long as himself; who ceases to *love* and to *breathe* at the same instant. Not that I yet state constancy in such an absurd, senseless, irrational continuance in friendship, as no injuries, or provocations whatsoever, can break off. For there are some injuries that extinguish the very relation between friends. *In which case*, a man ceases to be a friend, not from any inconstancy in his friendship, but from defect of an object for his friendship to exert itself upon. It is one thing for a father to cease to be a father, by casting off his son; and another for him to cease to be so, by the death of his son. In this the *relation* is at an end for want of a correlate: So in friendship, there are some passages of that high and hostile nature, that they really and properly constitute and denominate the person guilty of them, an enemy; and if so, how can the other person possibly continue a friend, since friendship essentially requires that it be between two at least; and

72 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

there can be no friendship, where there are not two friends ?

No body is bound to look upon his back-biter, or his underminer ; his betrayer, or his oppressor, as his friend. Nor indeed, is it possible that he should do so, unless he could alter the constitution and order of things, and establish a new nature, and a new morality in the world. For to remain unsensible of such provocations, is not constancy, but apathy. And therefore they discharge the person, so treated, from the proper obligations of a friend ; though christianity, I confess, binds him to the duties of a neighbour.

But to give you the true nature, and measures of constancy ; it is such a stability, and firmness of friendship, as over-looks and passes by all those lesser failures of kindness and respect, that partly thro' passion, partly thro' indiscretion, and such other frailties incident to human nature, a man may be sometimes guilty of, and yet still retain the same habitual good-will, and prevailing propensity of mind, to his friend, that he had before. And whose friendship soever is of that strength, and duration, as to stand its ground against, and remain unshaken by such assaults ; (which yet are strong enough to shake down and annihilate the friendship of little puny minds ;)

such

such an one (I say) has reached all the true measures of constancy: His friendship is of a noble make, and a lasting consistency; it resembles marble, and deserves to be wrote upon it.

But how few tempers in the world, are of that magnanimous frame, as to reach the heights of so great a virtue: Many offer at the effects of friendship, but they do not last; they are promising in the beginning, but they fail, and jade, and tire in the prosecution. For most people in the world are acted by levity, and humour, and by strange and irrational changes. And how often may we meet with those, who are one while courteous, civil, and obliging, (at least to their proportion) but within a small time after, are so supercilious, sharp, troublesome, fierce, and exceptionous, that they are not only short of the true character of friendship, but become the very sores and burthens of society? Such low, such worthless dispositions, how easily are they discovered, how justly are they despised? But now that we may pass from one contrary to another; *Christ, who is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever, in his Being, is so also in his affection.* He is not of the number, or nature, of those pitiful, mean pretenders to friendship, who perhaps will love and smile upon you one day, and not so much as know
you

74 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Sermon. 2.

you the next: Many of which sort there are in the world, who are not so much courted outwardly, but that inwardly they are detested much more.

Friendship is a kind of covenant; and most covenants run upon mutual terms and conditions. And therefore so long as we are exact in fulfilling the condition on our parts, I mean, exact according to the measures of *sincerity*, though not of *perfection*, we may be sure that *Christ* will not fail in the least *Iota* to fulfil every thing on his. The favour of relations, patrons and princes, is uncertain, ticklish and variable; and the friendship which they take up, upon the accounts of judgment, and merit, they most times lay down out of humour. But the friendship of *Christ* has none of these weaknesses, no such hollowness or unsoundness in it. *For neither principalities nor powers, things present, nor things to come; no, nor all the rage and malice of hell, shall be able to pluck the meanest of Christ's friends out of his bosom: For, whom he loves he loves to the end.*

Now from the particulars hitherto discoursed of, we may infer and learn these two things: 1. The *excellency* and value of friendship. *Christ the Son of the most high God*, the second person in the glorious Trinity, took upon him

our nature, that he might give a great instance and example of this virtue ; and condescended to be *a man*, only that he might be a *friend*. Our Creator, our Lord and King he was before ; but he would needs come down from all this, and, in a sort, become our equal, that he might partake of that noble quality that is properly between *equals*. Christ took not upon him *flesh* and *blood*, that he might conquer and rule nations, lead armies, or possess palaces ; but that he might have the relenting, the tenderness, and the compassions of human nature, which render it properly capable of friendship ; and, in a word, that he might have *our heart*, and we have his. God himself sets friendship above all considerations of kindred or consanguinity, as the greatest ground and argument of mutual endearment, in *Deut.* xv. 6. *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee to go and serve other gods, thou shalt not consent unto him.* The emphasis of the expression is very remarkable, it being a gradation, or ascent, by several degrees of dearthness, to that which is the highest of all. Neither *wife* nor *brother*, *son* nor *daughter*, though the nearest in cognation, are allowed to stand in competition with *a friend* ; who
if

if he fully answers the duties of that great relation, is indeed better and more valuable than all of them put together, and may serve instead of them; so that he, who has a firm, a worthy, and sincere friend, may *want* all the rest, without *missing* them. That which lies in a man's bosom, should be dear to him; but that which lies within his heart, ought to be much dearer. 2. In the next place, we learn from hence the high advantage of becoming truly pious and religious. When we have said and done all, it is only the true christian, and the religious person, who is, or can be sure of a friend; sure of obtaining, sure of keeping him. But as for the friendship of the world; when a man shall have done all that he can to make one his *friend*, employ'd the utmost of his wit and labour, beaten his brains, and emptied his purse, to create an endearment between him and the person, whose friendship he desires, he may, in the end, upon all these endeavours and attempts, be forced to write *vanity* and frustration: For, by them all, he may at last be no more able to get into the other's heart, than he is to thrust his hand into a pillar of brass. The man's affection, amidst all these kindnesses done him, remaining wholly unconcerned, and impregnable; just like a rock, which

which being plied continually by the waves, still throws them back again into the bosom of the sea that sent them, but is not at all moved by any of them.

People at first, while they are young and raw, and soft natured, are apt to think it an easy thing to gain love, and reckon their own friendship a sure price of another man's: But when experience shall have once opened their eyes, and shewed them the hardness of most hearts, the hollowness of others, and the baseness and ingratitude of almost all, they will then find, that a friend *is the gift of God*; and that he only, who made hearts, can unite them. For it is he, who creates those sympathies, and suitablenesses of nature, that are the foundation of all true friendship, and then by his providence brings persons so affected together.

It is an expression frequent in scripture, but infinitely more significant, than at first it is usually observed to be: namely, *That God gave such or such a person grace or favour in another's eyes*. As for instance, in *Genes. xxxix. 21.* it is said of *Joseph*, *that the Lord was with him, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison*. Still it is an invisible hand from heaven, that ties this knot, and mingles hearts

78 *Of the Love of CHRIST* Serm. 2.

hearts and souls, by strange, secret, and unaccountable conjunctions.

That heart shall surrender itself, and its friendship, to one man, at first view, which another has, in vain, been laying siege to for many years, by all the repeated acts of kindness imaginable.

Nay, so far is friendship from being of any human production, that unless nature be predisposed to it, by its own propensity or inclination, no arts of obligation shall be able to abate the secret hatreds and hostilities of some persons towards others. No friendly offices, no addresses, no benefits whatsoever, shall ever alter or allay that diabolical rancour, that frets and ferments in some hellish breasts, but that upon all occasions it will foam out at its soul mouth in slander and invective, and sometimes bite too in a shrewd turn or a *secret blow*. This is true and undeniable upon frequent *experience*; and happy those who can learn it at the cost of other men's.

But now, on the contrary, he who will give up his name to Christ in *faith unfeigned*, and a sincere obedience to all his righteous laws, shall be sure to find *love for love*, and *friendship for friendship*. The success is certain and infallible; and none ever yet miscarried in

in the attempt. For Christ freely offers his friendship to all; and sets no other rate upon so vast a purchase, but only that we would suffer him to be our *friend*. Thou perhaps spendest thy precious time in waiting upon such a great one, and thy estate in presenting him; and, probably after all, hast no other reward, but sometimes to be *smiled upon*, and always to be *smiled at*; and when thy greatest and most pressing occasions shall call for succour and relief, then to be deserted and cast off, *and not known*.

Now, I say, turn the stream of thy endeavours another way, and bestow but half that hearty, sedulous attendance upon thy Saviour, in the duties of prayer and mortification; and be at half that expence in charitable works, by relieving Christ in his poor members, and, in a word, study as much to please him who *died for thee*, as thou dost to court and humour thy great patron, who *cares not for thee*, and thou shalt make him thy friend for ever; a friend, who shall own thee in thy lowest condition, speak comfort to thee in all thy sorrows, counsel thee in all thy doubts, answer all thy wants, and, in a word, *never leave thee nor forsake thee*. But when all the hopes that thou hast raised upon the

the

the promises, or supposed kindneſſes of the fastidious, and fallacious great ones of the world, shall fail, and upbraid thee to thy face, he shall then take thee into his bosom, embrace, cherish, and support thee ; and, as the *Psalmist* expresses it, *he shall guide thee with his counsel here, and afterwards receive thee into glory.*

*To which God of his mercy vouchsafe to bring us all ; To whom be rendred and ascribed, &c.
Amen.*

Against

Against long Extempore Prayers.

A

S E R M O N

Preached on

ECCLESIASTES V. 2.

VOL. II.

G

SER-

=
=

S

—
Ba

V

Go
we
all
hon
the
teac
vile

SERMON III.

Against long Extempore Prayers.

ECCLES. V. 2.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few.

WE have here the wisest of men instructing us how to behave ourselves before God in his own house ; and particularly when we address to him in the most important of all duties, which is *Prayer*. *Solomon* had the honour to be spoken to by God himself, and therefore, in all likelihood, none more fit to teach us how to speak to God. A great privilege certainly for *dust* and *ashes* to be admitted

84 *A Discourse against* Sermon. 3.

ted to; and therefore it will concern us to manage it so, that in these our approaches to the King of heaven, his goodness may not cause us to forget his greatness, nor (as it is but too usual for subjects to use *privilege* against *prerogative*) his honour suffer by his condescension.

In the words we have these three things observable.

1. That whosoever appears in the house of God, and particularly in the way of prayer, ought to reckon himself, in a more especial manner, placed in the sight and presence of God.

2. That the vast and infinite distance between God and him, ought to create in him all imaginable awe and reverence, in such his addresses to God.

3. And *Lastly*, That this reverence required of him, is to consist in a serious preparation of his thoughts, and a sober government of his expressions: neither is *his mouth to be rash*, nor *his heart to be hasty*, in uttering any thing before God.

These things are evidently contained in the words, and do as evidently contain the whole sense of them. But I shall gather them all into this one proposition; namely,

That

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 85

That premeditation of thought, and brevity of expression, are the great ingredients of that reverence, that is required to a pious, acceptable, and devout prayer.

For the better handling of which, we will, in the first place, consider how, and by what way it is, that *prayer* works upon, or prevails with God, for the obtaining of the things we pray for. Concerning which, I shall lay down this general rule, that the way, by which prayer prevails with God, is wholly different from that, by which it prevails with men. And to give you this more particularly,

1. First of all, it prevails not with God by way of *information* or notification of the thing to him, which we desire of him. With men indeed, this is the common, and with wise men the chief, and should be the only way of obtaining what we ask of them. We represent and lay before them our wants and indigencies, and the misery of our condition ; which being made known to them, the quality and condition of the thing asked for, and of the persons who ask it, induces them to give that to us, and to do that for us, which we desire and petition for : But it is not so in our addresses to God ; for he knows our wants, and our conditions better than we ourselves : He is be-

fore-hand with all our prayers, *Matth. vi. 8.* *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him :* And in *Psal. cxxxix. 2.* *Thou understandest my thought afar off.* God knows our thoughts before the very heart that conceives them. And how then can he, who is but of yesterday, suggest any thing new to that eternal mind ! How can ignorance inform Omniscience !

2. Neither does prayer prevail with God by way of *persuasion*, or working upon the affections, so, as thereby to move him to pity or compassion. This indeed is the most usual, and most effectual way to prevail with men ; who, for the generality, are one part *reason*, and nine parts *affection*. So that one of a voluble tongue, and a dextrous insinuation, may do what he will with vulgar minds, and with wise men too, at their weak times. But God, who is as void of passion or affection, as he is of quantity or corporeity, is not to be dealt with this way. He values not our rhetorick, nor our pathetical harangues. He who applies to God, applies to an infinite Almighty Reason, a pure Act, all Intellect, the first Mover, and therefore not to be moved, or wrought upon himself. In all passion the mind suffers ; (as the very signification of the word imports)

but

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 87

but absolute, entire Perfection cannot suffer ; it is, and must be immoveable, and by consequence impassible. And therefore, in the *third* and *last* place, much less is God to be prevail'd upon by importunity, and (as it were) wearying him into a concession of what we beg of him. Though with men, we know this also is not unusual. A notable instance of which we have in *Luke* xviii. 4, 5. where the unjust judge being with a restless vehemence sued to for justice, says thus within himself : *Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

In like manner, how often are beggars relieved only for their eager and rude importunity ; and that the person who relieves them, is thereby informed or satisfied of their real want, nor yet moved to pity them by all their cry and cant, but to rid himself from their vexatious noise and din ; so that to purchase his quiet by a little alms, he gratifies the beggar ; but indeed relieves himself. But now, this way is farther from prevailing with God, than either of the former. For as Omniscience is not to be informed, so neither is Omnipotence to be wearied. We may much more

easily think to clamour the sun and stars out of their courses, than to word the great Creator of them out of the steady purposes of his own will, by all the vehemence and loudness of our petitions. Men may tire themselves with their own prayers, but God is not to be tired. The rapid motion, and whirl of things here below, interrupts not the inviolable rest and calmness of the noble beings above. While the winds roar and bluster here in the first and second regions of the air, there is a perfect serenity in the third. Mens desires cannot controul God's decrees.

And thus I have shewn, that the three ways by which *men prevail with men*, in their prayers and applications to them, have no place at all, in giving any efficacy to their addresses to God.

But you will ask then, Upon what account is it, that prayer becomes prevalent and efficacious with God, so as to procure us the good things we pray for? I answer upon this, That it is the fulfilling of that *condition*, upon which God has freely promised to convey his blessings to men. God, of his own absolute, unaccountable good will and pleasure, has thought fit to appoint and fix upon this, as the means by which he will supply and answer the wants
of

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 89

of mankind. As for instance, Suppose a prince should declare to any one of his subjects, that if he shall appear before him every morning in his bed-chamber, he shall receive of him a thousand talents. We must not here imagine, that the subject, by making this appearance, does either move or persuade his prince to give him such a sum of money ; No, he only performs the condition of the promise, and thereby acquires a right to the thing promised. He does indeed hereby *engage* his prince to give him this sum, though he does by no means *persuade* him : or rather, to speak more strictly and properly, the prince's own justice and veracity is an engagement upon the prince himself, to make good his promise to him, who fulfils the conditions of it.

But you will say, that upon this ground it will follow, that when we obtain any thing of God by prayer, we have it upon claim of justice, and not by way of gift, as a free result of his bounty.

I answer ; that both these are very well consistent ; for though he, who makes a promise upon a certain condition, is bound in justice, upon the fulfilling of that condition, to perform his promise ; yet it was perfectly grace and goodness, bounty and free mercy, that
first

first induced him to make the promise, and particularly to state the tenour of it, upon such a condition. *If we confess our sins*, says the apostle, 1 John i. 9. *God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*. Can any thing be freer, and more the effect of mere grace, than the forgiveness of sins? And yet it is certain from this Scripture, and many more, that it is firmly promised us upon condition of a penitent hearty confession of them; and consequently as certain it is, that God stands obliged here, even by his *faithfulness and justice*, to make good this his promise of forgiveness to those who come up to the terms of it by such a confession.

In like manner, for prayer, in reference to the good things prayed for. He who prays for a thing, as God has appointed him, gets thereby a right to the thing prayed for: But it is a right not springing from any merit or condignity, either in the prayer itself, or the person who makes it, to the *blessing* which he prays for; but from God's veracity, truth and justice, who having appointed prayer as the *condition* of that *blessing* , cannot but stand to what he himself had appointed; tho' that he did appoint it, was the free result and determination of his own will.

We

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 91

We have a full account of this whole matter from God's own mouth, in the 50th *Pſalm*. *Call upon him* (ſays God) *in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee.* Theſe are evidently the terms upon which God answers prayers: in which caſe there is no doubt, but the deliverance is ſtill of more worth than the prayer; and there is as little doubt alſo, that without ſuch a previous declaration made on God's part, a perſon ſo in trouble or diſtreſs, might pray his heart out, and yet God not be in the leaſt obliged by all his prayers, either in juſtice or honour, or indeed ſo much as in mercy, to deliver him; for mercy is free, and miſery, cannot oblige it. In a word, prayer procures *deliverance from trouble*, juſt as *Naaman's* dipping himſelf ſeven times in *Jordan*, procured him a deliverance from his leproſy; not by any virtue in itſelf adequate to ſo great an effect, you may be ſure; but from this, that it was appointed by God as the condition of his recovery; and ſo obliged the power of him, who appointed it, to give force and virtue to his own inſtitution, beyond what the nature of the thing itſelf could otherwiſe have raiſed it to.

Let this therefore be fix'd upon, as the ground-work of what we are to ſay upon this ſubject: That prayer prevails with God for
the

the *blessing* that we pray for, neither by way of *information* , nor yet of *persuasion* , and much less by the *importunity* of him who prays, and least of all by any *worth* in the prayer itself, equal to the thing prayed for ; but it prevails solely and entirely upon this account, that it is freely appointed by God, as the stated, allowed *condition* , upon which he will dispense his blessings to mankind.

But before I dismiss this consideration, it may be enquired ; *Whence it is* that prayer, rather than any other thing, comes to be appointed by God for this *condition* . In answer to which, though God's sovereign Will be a sufficient reason of its own counsels and determinations, and consequently a more than sufficient answer to all our enquiries ; yet since God in his infinite wisdom still adapts means to ends, and never appoints a thing to any use, but what it has a particular, and a natural fitness for ; I shall therefore presume to assign a reason, why prayer, before all other things, should be appointed to this noble use, of being the condition and glorious conduit, whereby to derive the bounties of heaven upon the sons of men. And it is this ; because prayer of all other acts of a rational nature, does most peculiarly qualify a man to be a fit object of the divine favour, by being most eminently
and

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 93

and properly *an act of dependance upon God*: Since to pray, or beg a thing of another, in the very nature and notion of it, imports these two things: 1. That the person praying stands in need of some good, which he is not able, by any power of his own to procure for himself: And, 2. That he acknowledges it in the power and pleasure of the person, whom he prays to, to confer it upon him. And this is properly that which men call *to depend*.

But some may reply; There is an universal dependence of all things upon God; for as much as he being the great Fountain and Source of being, first created, and since supports them by the word of his power; and consequently that this dependance belongs indifferently to the *wicked* as well as to the *just*, whose *prayer* nevertheless is declared *an abomination to God*.

But to this the answer is obvious, That the dependence here spoken of, is meant, not of a *natural*, but of a *moral* dependence. The first is necessary, the other voluntary. The first common to all, the other proper to the pious. The first respects God barely as a Creator, the other addresses to him as a Father. Now such a dependence upon God it is, that is properly seen in prayer. And being so, if we should in all humble reverence,
fer

set ourselves to examine the wisdom of the divine proceeding in this matter, even by the measures of our own reason, what could be more rationally thought of for the properest instrument, to bring down God's blessings upon the world, than such a temper of mind, as makes a man disown all ability in himself to supply his own wants, and at the same time own a transcendent fulness and sufficiency in God to do it for him? And what can be more agreeable to all principles, both of reason and religion, than that a creature endued with understanding and will, should acknowledge that dependence upon his Maker, by a free act of choice, which other creatures have upon him, only by necessity of nature?

But still, there is one objection more against our foregoing assertion, *viz. That prayer obtains the things prayed for, only as a condition, and not by way of importunity or persuasion*; for is not prayer said to prevail by frequency, *Luke xviii. 7.* And by fervency or earnestness in *James v. 16.*? And is not this a fair proof that God is importuned and persuaded into a grant of our petitions?

To this I answer two things: 1. That wheresoever God is said to answer prayers, either for their *frequency or fervency*, it is spoken of him only, *αὐθαρσας*; according
to

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 95

to the manner of men; and consequently, ought to be understood only of the *effect* or issue of such prayers, in the success certainly attending them, and not of the *manner of their efficiency*, that it is by *persuading*, or working upon the passions: As if we should say, frequent, fervent, and importunate prayers, are as certainly followed with God's grant of the thing pray'd for, as men use to grant that, which being overcome by excessive importunity, and persuasion, they cannot find in their hearts to deny. 2. I answer farther; that frequency and fervency of prayer prove effectual to procure of God the things pray'd for, upon no other account, but as they are acts of *dependance* upon God: which dependance we have already proved to be that thing essentially included in prayer, for which God has been pleased to make prayer the condition, upon which he determines to grant men such things as they need, and duly apply to him for. So that still there is nothing of *persuasion* in the case.

And thus having shewn (and I hope fully and clearly) how *prayer* operates towards the obtaining of the divine blessings; namely, as a *condition* appointed by God for that purpose, and no otherwise: And withal, for what reason it is singled out of all other acts of a rational

tional nature, to be this *condition*; namely, because it is the grand instance of such a nature's *dependance* upon God: we shall now from the same principle infer also, upon what account the highest reverence of God is so indispensably required of us in prayer, and all sort of irreverence so diametrically opposite to, and destructive of the very nature of it. And it will appear to be upon this, that in what degree any one lays aside his reverence of God, in the same he also quits his *dependance* upon him: Forasmuch as in every irreverent act, a man treats God as if he had indeed no need of him, and behaves himself as if he stood upon his own bottom, absolute and self-sufficient. This is the natural language, the true signification and import of all irreverence.

Now in all addresses, either to God or man, by speech, our reverence to them must consist of, and shew itself, in these two things.

First, A careful regulation of our thoughts, that are to dictate, and to govern our words; which is done by premeditation: And, *Secondly*, a due ordering of our words, that are to proceed from, and to express our thoughts; which is done by pertinence and brevity of expression.

David directing his prayer to God, joins these two together, as the two great, integral parts

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 97

parts of it, in *Psalms* xix. 14. *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord.* So that, it seems, his prayer adequately and entirely consisted of those two things, *meditation* and *expression*, as it were the *matter* and *form* of that noble composure; there being no mention at all of distortion of face, sanctified grimace, solemn wink, or foaming at the mouth, and the like; all which are circumstances of prayer of a later date, and brought into request by those fantastick zealots, who had a way of praying, as astonishing to the *eyes*, as to the *ears* of those that heard them. Well then; the first ingredient of a pious, and reverential prayer, is a previous regulation of the thoughts, as the text expresses it most emphatically; *Let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*; that is, in other words, Let it not venture to throw out its crude, extemporary, sudden and mishapen conceptions in the face of infinite perfection. Let not the heart *conceive* and *bring forth* together. This is monstrous and unnatural. All abortion is from infirmity and defect. And time is required to form the issue of the mind, as well as that of the body. The fitness or unfitness of the first thoughts, cannot be judged of, but by reflexion of the second: And be the invention never

so fruitful, yet in the mind, as in the earth, that which is cast into it, must lie hid and covered for a while, before it can be fit to shoot forth. These are the methods of nature, and it is seldom but the acts of religion conform to them.

He who is to pray, would he seriously *judge* of the work that is before him, has more to consider of, than either his heart can hold, or his head will turn itself to. *Prayer* is one of the greatest, and the hardest works, that a man has to do in this world; and was ever any thing difficult, or glorious atchieved by a sudden cast of a thought; a flying stricture of the imagination? *Presence* of mind is indeed good, but *haste* is not so. And therefore, let this be concluded upon, that in the business of prayer, to pretend to reverence, when there is no premeditation, is both impudence and contradiction.

Now this premeditation ought to respect these three things: 1. The *person*, whom we pray to. 2. The *matter* of our prayers: And, 3. The *order* and *disposition* of them.

1. And first, for the *person whom we pray to*. The same is to employ, who must needs also nonplus and astonish, thy meditations, and be made the object of thy thoughts, who infinitely transcends them. For all the know-
ing

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 99

ing and reasoning faculties of the soul are utterly baffled, and at a loss, when they offer at any idea of the great God. Nevertheless, since it is hard, if not impossible, to imprint an awe upon the affections, without suitable notions first formed in the apprehensions; we must in our prayers endeavour, at least, to bring these as near to God, as we can, by considering such of his divine perfections, as have, by their effects, in a great measure, manifested themselves to our senses, and, in a much greater, to the discourses of our reason.

As, first; Consider with thy self, how great and glorious a being that must needs be, that raised so vast and beautiful a fabrick, as this of the world, out of nothing, with the breath of his mouth, and can and will, with the same, reduce it to nothing again; and then consider, that this is that high, amazing incomprehensible being, whom thou addressdest thy pitiful self to in prayer.

Consider next, his infinite, all-searching knowledge, which looks through and through the most secret of our thoughts, ransacks every corner of the heart, ponders the most inward designs and ends of the soul in all a man's actions. And then consider, That this is the God, whom thou hast to deal with in prayer; the God, who observes the postures, the frame

and motion of thy mind, in all thy approaches to him; and whose piercing eye it is impossible to elude, or escape, by all the tricks and arts of the subtillest, and most refined hypocrisy. And, lastly, consider the great, the fiery, and the implacable jealousy that he has for his honour; and that he has no other use of the whole creation, but to serve the ends of it: And, above all, that he will, in a most peculiar manner, *be honoured of those who draw near to him*; and will by no means suffer himself to be mocked and affronted, under a pretence of being worshipped; nor endure, that a wretched, contemptible, sinful creature, who is but a piece of living dirt at best, should at the same time *bend the knee to him, and spit in his face*. And, now consider, that this is the God, whom thou prayest to; and whom thou usest with such intolerable indignity, in every unworthy prayer thou puttest up to him; every bold, saucy, and familiar word, that (upon confidence of being one of *God's elect*) thou presumest to debase so great a majesty with: And for an instance of the dreadful curse that attends such a daring irreverence, consider how God used *Nadab and Abihu* for venturing to offer *strange fire before him*; and then know, that every unhallowed, unfitting prayer, is a *strange fire*: A fire, that will be sure to destroy the offering,

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 101

offering, though mercy should spare the *offerer*. Consider these things seriously, deeply, and severely, till the consideration of them affects thy heart, and humbles thy spirit, with such awful apprehensions of thy Maker, and such abject reflexions upon thy self, as may lay thee in the dust before him: And know, that the lower thou fallest, the higher will thy prayer rebound: And that thou art never so fit to pray to God, as when a sense of thy own unworthiness makes thee ashamed even to speak to him.

2. The second object of our premeditation, *is the matter of our prayers*. For, as we are to consider, *whom we are to pray to*; so are we to consider also, *what we are to pray for*; and this requires no ordinary application of thought, to distinguish, or judge of. Men's prayers are generally dictated by their desires, and their desires are the issues of their affections; and their affections are for the most part influenced by their corruptions. The first constituent principle of a well-conceived prayer, is to know, *What not to pray for*; which the scripture assures us, that some do not, while they *pray for what they may spend upon their lusts*, James iv. 3. Asking such things as it is a contumely to God to hear, and damnation to themselves to receive. No man is to pray

for any thing either sinful, or directly tending to sin. No man is to pray for a *temptation*, and much less to desire God to be his *tempter*; which he would certainly be, should he, at the instance of any man's prayer, administer fuel to his sinful or absurd appetites. Nor is any one to ask of God things mean and trivial, and beneath the majesty of heaven, to be concerned about, or solemnly address'd to for. Nor, lastly, is any one to admit into his petitions things superfluous or extravagant, such as wealth, greatness, and honour; which we are so far from being warranted to beg of God, that we are to beg his grace to despise and undervalue them: and it were much, if the same things should be the proper objects both of our self-denial, and of our prayers too; and that we should be allowed to sollicite the satisfaction, and enjoined to endeavour the mortification of the same desires.

The things that we are to pray for, are either, 1. Things of *absolute necessity*; or, 2. Things of *unquestionable charity*. Of the first sort, are all spiritual graces required in us, as the indispensable conditions of our salvation: Such as are, *repentance, faith, hope, charity, temperance*, and all other virtues, that are either the parts or principles of a pious life. These are to be the prime subject matter of our prayers;
and

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 103

and we shall find, that nothing comes this way so easily from heaven, as those things that will assuredly bring us to it. The spirit dictates all such petitions, and God himself is first the Author, and then the Fulfiller of them; owning and accepting them, both as our duty, and his own production. *The other sort of things*, that may allowably be prayed for, are things of manifest, unquestionable charity: Such as are a competent measure of the innocent comforts of life, as health, peace, maintenance, and a success of our honest labours: And yet, even these but conditionally, and with perfect resignation to the will and wisdom of the sovereign Disposer of all that belongs to us; who (if he finds it more for his honour, to have us serve him with sick, crazy, languishing bodies, with poverty, and extreme want of all things; and lastly, with our country all in a flame about our ears) ought in all this, and much more, to overrule our prayers, and desires, into an absolute acquiescence in his all-wise disposal of things; and to convince us, that our prayers are sometimes best answered, when our desires are most opposed.

In fine, to state the whole matter of our prayers in one word; nothing can be fit for us to pray for, but what is fit and honourable

for our great Mediator and *Master of requests*, *Jesus Christ* himself, to intercede for. This is to be the unchangeable rule and measure of all our petitions. And then, if Christ is to convey these our petitions to his father, can any one dare to make him, who was holiness and purity itself, an advocate and solicitor for his lusts? Him who was nothing but meekness, and lowliness, and humility, his providore for such things as can only feed his pride, and flush his ambition? No certainly; when we come as suppliants to the throne of grace, where Christ sits as intercessor at God's right hand, nothing can be fit to proceed out of our mouth, but what is fit to pass thro' his.

3. The *third* and *last* thing, that calls for a previous meditation to our prayers, is the *order* and *disposition* of them. For though God does not command us to set off our prayers with dress and artifice, to flourish it in trope and metaphor, to beg our daily bread in blank verse, or to shew any thing of the *poet* in our devotions, but *indigence* and *want*; I say, though God is far from requiring such things of us in our prayers, yet he requires that we should manage them with sense and reason. Fineness is not expected, but decency is; and though we cannot declaim, as orators, yet he will have us speak like men, and
tender

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 105

tender him the results of that understanding and judgment, that essentially constitute a rational nature.

But I shall briefly cast what I have to say upon this particular into these following assertions.

1. That nothing can express our reverence to God in prayer, that would pass for irreverence towards a great man. Let any subject tender his prince a petition, fraught with nonsense and incoherence, confusion and impertinence; and can he expect that majesty should answer it with any thing but a deaf ear, a frowning eye, or (at best) vouchsafe it any other reward, but by a gracious oblivion to forgive the person, and forget the petition?

2. Nothing absurd and irrational, and such as a wise man would despise, can be acceptable to God in prayer. *Solomon* expressly tells us in *Ecclesiastes* v. 4. that *God has no pleasure in fools*; nor is it possible that an infinite Wisdom should. The Scripture all along expresses *sin* and *wickedness* by the name of *folly*: And therefore, certainly folly is too near akin to it, to find any approbation from God in so great a duty: It is the simplicity of the *heart*, and not of the *head*, that is the best inditer of our petitions. That which proceeds from the latter, is undoubtedly *the sacrifice of fools*; and
God

God is never more weary of *sacrifice*, than when a fool is the priest, and folly the oblation.

3. And *Lastly*, Nothing rude, slight, and careless, or indeed less than the very best that a man can offer, can be acceptable or pleasing to God in prayer. *If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? If ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now to thy governor, and see whether he will be pleased with thee, or accept thy person, saith the Lord of hosts?* Malachi i. 8. God rigidly expects a return of his own gifts; and where he has given ability, will be served by acts proportionable to it. And he who has parts to raise and propagate his own honour by, but none to employ in the worship of him that gave them, does (as I may so express it) refuse to wear God's livery in his own service, adds sacrilege to prophaneness, strips and starves his devotions, and (in a word) falls directly under the dint of that curse, denounced in the last verse of the first of *Malachi*, *Cursed be the deceiver that bath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing.* The same is here, both the deceiver, and the deceived too; for God very well knows *what* he gives men, and *why*; and where he has bestowed judgment, learning, and utterance, will
not

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 107

not endure that men should be accurate in their discourse, and loose in their devotions ; or think, that the great *Author of every good and perfect gift*, will be put off with ramble and confused talk, babble, and tautology.

And thus much for the *order* and *disposition* of our prayers, which certainly requires precedent thought and meditation. God has declared himself the *God of order* in all things ; and will have it observed, in what he commands others, as well as in what he does himself. *Order* is the great rule or art by which God made the world, and by which he still governs it : nay, the world itself is nothing else ; and all this glorious system of things, is but the chaos put into order : And how then can God, who has so eminently owned himself concerned for this excellent thing, brook such absurdity and confusion, as the slovenly and profane negligence some treat him with, in their most solemn addresses to him ? All which is the natural, unavoidable consequent of unpreparedness, and want of premeditation ; without which, whosoever presumes to pray, cannot be so properly said to *approach* to, as to *break* in upon God. And surely, he who is so hardy as to do so, has no reason in the earth to expect that the success, which follows
his

his prayers, should be greater than the preparation that goes before them.

Now from what has been hitherto discoursed of this first and grand qualification of a pious and devout prayer, to wit, *premeditation of thought*, what can be so naturally and so usefully inferr'd, as the high expediency, or rather the absolute necessity of a set-form of prayer, to guide our devotions by? We have lived in an age that has despised, contradicted, and counter-acted all the principles and practices of the primitive christians, in taking the measures of their duty both to God and man, and of their behaviour both in matters civil and religious; but in nothing more scandalously, than in their vile abuse of the great duty of prayer; concerning which, though it may with the clearest truth be affirmed, that there has been no church yet of any account in the christian world, but what has governed its publick worship of God by a liturgy or set-form of prayer; yet these enthusiastick innovators, the bold and blind reformers of all antiquity, and *wiser* than the whole catholick church besides, introduced into the room of it, a faucy, senseless, extemporary way of speaking to God; affirming, that this was a *praying by the spirit*; and that the use of all set-forms was *stinting of the spirit*. A pretence, I confess,

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 109

fess, popular and plausible enough with such idiots, as take the sound of words for the sense of them. But, for the full confutation of it, (which, I hope, shall be done both easily and briefly too) I shall advance this one assertion in direct contradiction to that; namely,

That the praying by a set-form is not a stinting of the spirit; and the praying extempore truly and properly is so.

For the proving and making out of which, we will first consider, *what it is to pray by the spirit.* A thing much talked of, but not so convenient for the talkers of it, and pretenders to it, to have it rightly stated and understood. In short, it includes in it these two things:

1. A praying with the heart, which is sometimes called the *spirit*, or *inward man*; and so it is properly opposed to hypocritical lip-devotions, in which the *heart* or *spirit* does not go along with a man's words.

2. It includes in it also a praying according to the rules prescribed by God's *holy Spirit*, and held forth to us in his reveal'd Word, which Word was both dictated and confirmed by this Spirit; and so it is opposed to the praying unlawfully, or unwarrantably; and that, either in respect of the matter, or manner of our prayers: as when we desire of God such things, or in such a way, *as the spirit of God*, speaking
in

in his holy Word, does by no means warrant or approve of. So that to *pray by the spirit*, signifies neither more nor less, but to pray knowingly, heartily, and affectionately for such things, and in such a manner, as the Holy Ghost in Scripture either commands or allows of. As for any other kind of *praying by the spirit*, upon the best inquiry that I can make into these matters, I can find none. And if some say (as I know they both impudently and blasphemously do) that to *pray by the spirit*, is to have the Spirit immediately inspiring them, and by such inspiration speaking within them, and so dictating their prayers to them, let them either produce plain Scripture, or do a miracle to prove this by. But till then, he who shall consider what kind of prayers these pretenders to *the spirit* have been notable for, will find, that they have as little cause to father their prayers, as their practices, upon the spirit of God.

These two things are certain, and I do particularly recommend them to your observation. One, that this way of *praying by the spirit* (as they call it) was begun, and first brought into use here in *England*, in queen *Elizabeth's* days, by a *popish* priest and *dominican* fryar, one *Faithful Commyn* by name; who, counterfeiting himself a protestant, and a zealot of the
highest

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 111

highest form, set up this new spiritual way of praying, with a design to bring the people first to a contempt, and from thence to an utter hatred and disuse of our *Common-prayer*, which he still reviled as only a translation of the Mass, thereby to distract mens minds, and to divide our church. And this he did with such success, that we have lived to see the effects of his labours in the utter subversion of church and state. Which hellish negotiation, when this malicious hypocrite came to *Rome* to give the pope an account of, he received of him (as so notable a service well deserved) besides a *thousand* thanks, *two thousand* ducats for his pains. So that now you see here the original of this extempore way of praying by the spirit. The other thing that I would observe to you, is, that in the neighbour nation of *Scotland*, one of the greatest * monsters of men that (I believe) ever lived, and actually in league with the devil, was yet, by the confession of all that heard him, the most excellent at this extempore way of *praying by the spirit* of any man in his time; none was able to come near him, or to compare with him. But surely now, he who shall venture to ascribe the prayers of such a wretch, made up of adulteries, incest, witchcraft, and other villainies, not to be named, to

* Major *John Weyer*: See *Ravillac Rediviv.*

the *spirit of God*, may as well strike in with the *Pharisees*, and ascribe the miracles of Christ to the devil. And thus having shewn both what ought to be meant by *praying by the spirit*, and what ought not, cannot, be meant by it; let us now see whether a *set-form*, or this *extemporary way*, be the greater hinderer and stinter of it: In order to which, I shall lay down these three assertions.

1. That the soul or mind of man is but of a limited nature in all its workings, and consequently cannot supply two distinct faculties at the same time, to the same height of operation.

2. That the finding words and expressions for prayer, is the proper business of the brain and the invention; and that the finding devotion and affection to accompany and go along with those expressions, is properly the work and business of the heart.

3. That this devotion and affection is indispensibly required in *prayer*, as the principal and most essential part of it, and that in which the spirituality of it does most properly consist.

Now from these three things put together, this must naturally and necessarily follow; that as *spiritual prayer*, or *praying by the spirit*, taken in the right sense of the word, consists

pro-

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 113

properly in that affection and devotion, that the heart exercises and employs in the work of prayer; so, whatsoever gives the soul scope and liberty to exercise and employ this affection and devotion, that does most effectually help and inlarge the spirit of prayer; and whatsoever diverts the soul from employing such affection and devotion, that does most directly stint and hinder it. Accordingly let this now be our rule, whereby to judge of the efficacy of a *set-form*, and of the *extempore way* in the present business. As for a *set-form*, in which the words are ready prepared to our hands, the soul has nothing to do, but to attend to the work of raising the affections and devotions to go along with those words: so that all the powers of the soul are took up in applying the *heart* to this great duty; and it is the exercise of the *heart* (as has been already shewn) that is truly and properly *a praying by the spirit*. On the contrary, in all extempore prayer, the powers and faculties of the soul are called off from dealing with the *heart* and the affections; and that both in the speaker, and in the hearer; both in him who makes, and in him who is to join in such prayers.

And first for the minister, who makes and utters such extempore prayers. He is wholly employing his invention, both to conceive

matter, and find words and expressions to cloath it in: This is certainly the work, which takes up his *mind* in this exercise: and since the nature of man's mind is such, that it cannot with the same vigour, at the same time, attend the work of invention, and that of raising the affections also; nor measure out the same supply of spirits and intention for the carrying on the operations of the *head*, and those of the *heart* too; it is certain, that while the head is so much employed, the heart must be idle, and very little employed; and perhaps not at all: And consequently, if *to pray by the spirit* be to pray with the heart, and the affections; it is also as certain, that while a man prays *extempore*, he does *not pray by the spirit*: nay, the very truth of it is, that while he is so doing, he is not *praying* at all, but he is *studying*, he is beating his *brain*, while he should be drawing out his *affections*.

And then for the people that are to hear, and join with him in such prayers; it is manifest, that they, not knowing before-hand, what the minister will say, must, as soon as they do hear him, presently busy and bestir their minds, both to apprehend and understand the meaning of what they hear; and withal, to judge whether it be of such a nature, as to be fit for them to join and concur with him
in.

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 115

in. So that the people also are, by this course, put to *study*, and to employ their apprehending and judging faculties, while they should be exerting their affections and devotions; and consequently by this means the *spirit of prayer is stinted*, as well in the congregation that follows, as in the minister, who first conceives a prayer after their extempore way: which is a truth so clear, and indeed self-evident, that it is impossible that it should need any further arguments to demonstrate or make it out.

The sum of all is this; that since a set-form of prayer leaves the soul wholly free, to employ its affections and devotions, in which *the spirit of prayer* does most properly consist; it follows, that *the spirit of prayer* is thereby, in a singular manner, helped, promoted and enlarged: and since, on the other hand, the extempore way withdraws and takes off the soul from employing its *affections*, and engages it chiefly, if not wholly, about the use of its invention; it as plainly follows, that the *spirit of prayer* is, by this means, unavoidably cramp'd and hinder'd, and (to use their own word) *stinted*: which was the proposition that I undertook to prove. But there are two things, I confess, that are extremely *hinder'd* and *stinted* by a set-form of prayer, and equally *furthered* and *enlarged* by the extempore way; which,

without all doubt, is the true cause why the former is so much decried, and the latter so much extolled by the men whom we are now pleading with. The first of which is *pride* and *ostentation*; the other *faction* and *sedition*.

I. And first for *pride*. I do not in the least question, but the chief design of such as use the extempore way, is to amuse *the unthinking rabble* with an admiration of their gifts; their whole devotion proceeding from no other principle, but only a *love to hear themselves talk*. And, I believe, it would put *Lucifer* himself hard to it, to out-vye the pride of one of those fellows pouring out his extempore stuff amongst his ignorant, whining, factious followers, listening to and applauding his copious flow and cant, with the ridiculous accents of their impertinent groans. And the truth is, extempore prayer, even when best and most dextrously performed, is nothing else, but a business of invention and wit, (such as it is) and requires no more to it, but a teeming imagination, a bold front, and a ready expression; and deserves much the same commendation (were it not in a matter too *serious* to be *sudden* upon) which is due to *extempore* verses: only with this difference, that there is necessary to these latter, a competent measure of wit and learning; whereas the former may be done

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 117

done with very little wit, and no learning at all.

And now, Can any sober person think it reasonable, that the publick devotions of a whole congregation should be under the conduct, and at the mercy of a pert, empty, conceited *holder-forth*, whose chief (if not sole) intent is to vaunt his spiritual clack, and (as I may so speak) to *pray prizes*; whereas prayer is a duty, that recommends itself to the acceptance of Almighty God, by no other qualification so much, as by the profoundest humility, and the lowest esteem, that a man can possibly have of himself?

Certainly the extemporizing faculty is never more out of its element, than in the pulpit: Though even here, it is much more excusable in a sermon, than in a prayer; forasmuch as in that, a man addresses himself but to men; men like himself, whom he may therefore make bold with; as, no doubt, for so doing, they will also make bold with him: Besides the peculiar advantage attending all such sudden conceptions, that as they are quickly born, so they quickly die: it being seldom known, where the speaker has so very *fluent* an *invention*, but the hearer also has the gift of as *fluent* a *memory*.

2. The other thing that has been hitherto so little befriended by a set-form of *prayer*, and so very much by the extempore way, is *faction* and *sedition*. It has been always found an excellent way of girning at the government in *Scripture-phrases*. And we all know the common dialect, in which the great masters of this art used to pray for the king, and which may justly pass for only a cleaner and more refined kind of libelling him in *the Lord*: As, *That God will turn his heart, and open his eyes*: As if he were a *Pagan*, yet to be converted to Christianity, with many other sly, virulent, and malicious insinuations, which we may every day hear of from (those mints of treason and rebellion) their conventicles; and for which, and a great deal less, some princes and governments would make them not only eat their words, but the tongue that spoke them too. In fine, let all their extempore harangues be considered, and duly weighed, and you shall find a *spirit* of pride, faction, and sedition, predominant in them all: the only *spirit* which those impostors do really, and indeed *pray by*.

I have been so much the longer, and the earnestest, against this intoxicating, bewitching cheat of extempore prayer, being fully satisfied in my conscience, that it has been all along
the

Serm. 3. *long Extempore Prayers.* 119

the devil's master-piece and prime engine to overthrow our church by. For I look upon this as a most unanswerable truth, that whoever renders the publick worship of God contemptible amongst us, must in the same degree weaken and discredit our whole religion. And, I hope, I have also proved it to be a truth altogether as clear, that this extempore way naturally brings all the contempt upon the worship of God, that both the *folly* and *faction* of men can possibly expose it to: And therefore, as a thing neither subservient to the true purposes of religion, nor grounded upon principles of reason, nor lastly, suitable to the practice of antiquity, ought by all means to be exploded and cast out of every sober and well-order'd church; or that will be sure to throw the church itself out of doors.

And thus I have at length finished what I had to say of the first ingredient of a pious and reverential prayer, which was *premeditation of thought*; prescribed to us in these words, *Let not thy mouth be rash, nor thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God.* Which excellent words, and most wise advice of *Solomon*, whoever can reconcile to the expediency, decency, or usefulness of extempore prayer, I shall acknowledge him a man of greater ability and parts of mind, than *Solomon* himself.

The other ingredient of a reverential and duly qualified prayer, is *a pertinent brevity of expression*, mentioned and recommended in that part of the text; *Therefore let thy words be few*. But this I cannot dispatch now, and therefore shall not enter upon it at this time.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be render'd and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

Against

*Against long and Extempore Prayers ;
in behalf of the Liturgy of the Church
of England.*

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd on the

Preceding SUBJECT.

... long and ...
... of the ...
... of England

FERMON

... on the

Preceding SUBJECT.

Se

S

U

Be

I

thin

Go

oug

ma

Go

SERMON IV.

Upon the preceding Subject, and in
behalf of the *Liturgy* of the Church
of *England*.

ECCLES. V. 2.

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not
thine heart be hasty to utter any thing
before God; for God is in heaven,
and thou upon earth; therefore let thy
words be few.*

I Formerly began to discourse upon these
words, and observed in them these three
things.

1. That whosoever appears in the house of
God, and particularly in the way of prayer,
ought to reckon himself, in a more especial
manner, placed in the sight and presence of
God: And,

2. That

2. That the vast and infinite distance between God and him, ought to create in him all imaginable awe and reverence in such his addresses to God.

3. And *lastly*; That this reverence required of him, is to consist in a serious preparation of his thoughts, and a sober government of his expressions: Neither is his *mouth to be rash, nor his heart to be hasty in uttering any thing before God.*

These three things I shew'd were evidently contained in the words, and did as evidently contain the whole sense of them. But I gathered them all into this one proposition; namely,

That premeditation of thought, and brevity of expression, are the great ingredients of that reverence that is required to a pious, acceptable, and devout prayer.

The first of these, which is *premeditation of thought*, I then fully treated of, and dispatch'd; and shall now proceed to the other, which is a *pertinent brevity of expression*; *Therefore let thy words be few.*

Concerning which, we shall observe, first, in general, that to be able to express our minds briefly and fully too, is absolutely the greatest perfection and commendation that speech is capable of; such a mutual communication
of

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 125

of our thoughts, being (as I may so speak) the next approach to *intuition*; and the nearest imitation of the converse of blessed *spirits made perfect*, that our condition in this world can possibly raise us to. Certainly the greatest and the wisest conceptions that ever issued from the mind of men, have been couched under, and delivered in a few, close, home, and significant words.

But to derive the credit of this way of speaking much higher, and from an example infinitely greater, than the greatest human wisdom, was it not authorized, and ennobled by God himself in his making of the world? Was not the work of all the six days transacted in so many words? There was no circumlocution, or amplification, in the case; which makes the rhetorician *Longinus*, in his book of the loftiness of speech, so much admire the height and grandeur of *Moses's* style in his first chapter of *Genesis*, Ὁ τῶν Ἰουδαίων θεομοδῆλης, ἔχ' ὁ τυχὼν ἀνὴρ. The lawgiver of the Jews (says he, meaning *Moses*) was no ordinary man; ἐπειδὴ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ δύναμιν κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἐγνώρισε καὶ ἐξέφηεν, because (says he) he set forth the divine power suitably to the majesty and greatness of it. But how did he this? Why, εὐθὺς ἐν τῇ εἰσβολῇ γράψας τῶν νόμων, ἔπαιεν ὁ Θεός, φησὶ, τί; γινώσκω φῶς, καὶ ἐγένετο, γινώσκω γῆ, καὶ ἐγένετο, &c.

&c. For that (*says he*) in the very entrance of his laws, he gives us this short and present account of the whole creation: God said, *Let there be light, and there was light; Let there be an earth, a sea, and a firmament, and there was so.* So that all this high elogy and encomium given by this heathen of *Moses*, sprang only from the majestic brevity of this one expression; an expression so suited to the greatness of a Creator, and so expressive of his boundless, creative power, as a power infinitely above all controul, or possibility of finding the least obstacle of delay, in atchieving its mightiest and most stupendous works. Heaven, and earth, and all the host of both (as it were) dropt from his mouth; and nature itself was but the product of a word; a word not designed to express, but to constitute and give a being; and not so much the representation, as the cause of what it signified.

This was God's way of speaking in his first forming of the universe: And was it not so, in the next grand instance of his power, his governing of it too? For are not the great instruments of government, his laws, drawn up and digested into a few sentences? The whole body of them containing but ten commandments, and some of those commandments not so many words? Nay, and have we

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 127

not these also brought into yet a narrower compass by him, who best understood them? *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.* Precepts, nothing like the tedious, endless, confused trash of human laws; laws so numerous, that they not only exceed men's practice, but also surpass their arithmetick; and so voluminous, that no mortal head, nor shoulders neither, must ever pretend themselves able to *bear* them. In God's laws the words are few, the sense vast and infinite. In human laws, you shall be sure to have words enough; but, for the most part, to discern the sense and reason of them, you had need read them with a microscope.

And thus having shewn, how the Almighty utters himself, when he speaks, and that upon the greatest occasions; let us now descend from heaven to earth, from God to man, and shew, that it is no presumption for us to conform our words, as well as our actions, to the supreme pattern, and, according to our poor measures, to imitate the wisdom that we adore. And for this, has it not been noted by the best observers, and the ablest judges, both of things and persons, that the wisdom of any people or nation has been most seen in the proverbs and short sayings commonly received
amongst

amongst them? And what is a proverb, but the experience and observation of several ages, gathered and summ'd up into one expreffion? The fcripture vouches *Solomon* for the *wifeft of men*, and they are his *Proverbs* that prove him fo. The feven wife men of *Greece*, fo famous for their wifdom all the world over, acquired all that fame each of them, by a fingle fentence, confifting of two or three words. And *γνώρισε αὐτόν* ftill lives and flourifhes in the mouths of all, while many vaft volumes are extint, and funk into duft and utter oblivion. And then for books, we fhall generally find, that the moft excellent, in any art or fcience, have been ftill the fmalleft, and moft compendious: And this not without ground; for it is an argument that the author was a mafter of what he wrote; and had a clear notion, and a full comprehension of the fubject before him. For the *reason* of things lies in a little compafs, if the mind could at any time be fo happy as to light upon it. Moft of the writings and difcourfes in the world, are but illuftration and rhetorick, which fignifies as much as nothing to a mind eager in purfuit after the caufes and philofophical truth of things. It is the work of fancy to *inlarge*, but of judgment to *fhorten* and *contract*; and therefore this muft needs be as far above the other,

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 129

other, as judgment is a greater and a nobler faculty than fancy or imagination. All philosophy is reduced to a few principles, and those principles comprized in a few propositions. And as the whole structure of *speculation* rests upon three or four axioms, or maxims; so that of practice also bears upon a very small number of rules. And surely, there was never yet any *rule* or *maxim* that filled a volume, or took up a week's time to be got by heart. No; these are the *apices rerum*, the tops and sums, the very spirit and life of things extracted and abridged; just as all the lines drawn from the vastest circumference, do at length meet and unite in the smallest of things, a *point*; and it is but a very little piece of wood, with which a true artist will measure all the timber in the world. The truth is, there could be no such thing as art or science, could not the mind of man gather the general natures of things out of the numberless heap of particulars, and then bind them up into such short aphorisms or propositions; that so they may be made portable to the memory, and thereby become ready and at hand for the judgment to apply, and make use of, as there shall be occasion.

In fine, brevity and succinctness of speech, is that, which in philosophy or speculation we

call *maxim*, and first principle; in the counsels and resolves of practical wisdom, and the deep mysteries of religion, *oracle*; and lastly, in matters of wit, and the finenesses of imagination, *epigram*. All of them severally, and in their kinds the greatest, and the noblest things that the mind of man can shew the force and dexterity of its faculties in.

And now, if this be the highest excellency, and perfection of speech, in all other things, can we assign any true, solid reason, why it should not be so likewise in prayer? Nay, is there not rather the clearest reason imaginable, why it should be much more so? Since most of the fore-mentioned things are but addresses to an human understanding, which may need as many words as may fill a volume, to make it understand the truth of one line. Whereas prayer is an address to that Eternal Mind, which (as we have shewn before) such as rationally invoke, pretend not to inform. Nevertheless, since the nature of man is such, that while we are yet in the body, our reverence and worship of God must of necessity proceed in some analogy to the reverence, that we shew to the grandees of this world, we will here see, what the judgment of all wise men is, concerning fewness of words, when we appear as suppliants before our earthly

ly

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 131

ly superiors; and we shall find, that they generally allow it to import these three things: 1. *Modesty.* 2. *Discretion;* And 3. Height of *respect to the person addressed to.* And first, for *Modesty.* Modesty is a kind of shame or bashfulness, proceeding from the sense a man has of his own defects, compared with the perfections of him whom he comes before. And that which is modesty towards men, is worship and devotion towards God. It is a virtue, that makes a man unwilling to be seen, and fearful to be heard; and yet, for that very cause, never fails to make him, both seen with favour, and heard with attention. It loves not many words, nor indeed needs them. For modesty addressing to any one of a generous worth and honour, is sure to have that man's honour for its advocate, and his generosity for its intercessor. And how then is it possible for such a virtue to run out into words? Loquacity storms the ear, but modesty takes the heart; that is troublesome, this gentle, but irresistible. Much speaking is always the effect of confidence; and confidence still presupposes, and springs from the persuasion that a man has of his own worth: Both of them, certainly, very unfit qualifications for a petitioner.

2. The second thing that naturally shews itself in paucity of words, is *discretion*; and particularly, that prime and eminent part of it, that consists in a care of offending: Which *Solomon* assures us, that in much speaking, it is hardly possible for us to avoid: In *Prov. x. 19. In the multitude of words* (says he) *there wanteth not sin.* It requiring no ordinary skill for a man to make his tongue run by rule; and, at the same time, to give it both its lesson and its liberty too. For seldom or never is there much spoke, but something or other had better been not spoke; there being nothing that the mind of man is so apt to kindle, and take distaste at, as at words: And therefore, whensoever any one comes to prefer a suit to another, no doubt, the fewer of them the better; since, where so very little is said, it is sure to be either candidly *accepted*, or, which is next, easily *excused*: But, at the same time, to petition, and to provoke too, is certainly very preposterous.

3. The third thing, that *brevity of speech* commends itself by, in all petitionary addresses, is a peculiar respect to the person addressed to: For, whosoever petitions his superior, in such a manner, does, by his very so doing, confess him better able to understand, than he himself can be to express his own case. He owns him,

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 133

as a patron, of a preventing judgment and goodness, and, upon that account, able, not only to answer, but also to anticipate his requests. For, according to the most natural interpretation of things, this is to ascribe to him a sagacity so quick and piercing, that it were presumption to inform; and a benignity so great, that it were needless to importune him. And can there be a greater and more winning deference to a superior, than to treat him under such a character? Or, can any thing be imagined so naturally fit and efficacious, both to enforce the petition, and to endear the petitioner? A short petition to a great man, is not only a suit to him for his favour, but also a panegyrick upon his parts.

And thus I have given you the three commendatory qualifications of brevity of speech, in our applications to the great ones of the world. Concerning which, as I shewed before, that it was impossible for us to form our addresses, even to God himself, but with some proportion and resemblance to those that we make to our fellow mortals, in a condition much above us; so it is certain, that whatsoever the general judgment and consent of mankind allows to be expressive and declarative of our honour to those, must (only with due allowance of the difference of the object) as really

and properly declare and signify that honour and adoration that is due from us to the great God. And, consequently, what we have said for brevity of speech, with respect to the former, ought equally to conclude for it, with relation to him too.

But to argue more immediately and directly to the point before us: I shall now produce five arguments, enforcing brevity, and cashiering all prolixity of speech, with peculiar reference to our addresses to God.

1. And the first argument shall be taken from this consideration: *That there is no reason alledgible for the Use of length, or prolixity of speech, that is at all applicable to prayer.* For, whosoever uses multiplicity of words, or length of discourse, must of necessity do it for one of these three purposes; either to *inform*, or *persuade*; or lastly, to *weary* and *overcome* the person, whom he directs his discourse to. But the very first foundation of what I had to say upon this subject, was laid by me, in demonstrating, that prayer could not possibly prevail with God, any of these three ways. Forasmuch as being omniscient, he could not be informed; and, being void of passion, or affections, he could not be persuaded; and lastly, being omnipotent, and infinitely great, he could not, by any importunity,

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 135

nity, be wearied, or overcome. And, if so, what use then can there be of rhetorick, harangue, or multitude of words in prayer? For, if they should be designed for information, must it not be infinitely sottish and unreasonable, to go about to inform him, who can be ignorant of nothing? Or, to persuade him, whose unchangeable nature makes it impossible for him to be moved, or wrought upon? Or, lastly, by long and much speaking, to think to weary him out, whose infinite power, all the strength of men and angels, and the whole world put together, is not able to encounter, or stand before? So that the truth is, by loquacity and prolixity of prayer, a man does really and indeed (whether he thinks so or no) rob God of the honour of those three great attributes, and neither treats him as a person omniscient, or unchangeable, or omnipotent. For, on the other side, all the usefulness of long speech in human converse, is founded only upon the defects and imperfections of human nature. For he whose knowledge is at best but limited, and whose intellect, both in apprehending and judging, proceeds by a small diminutive light, cannot but receive an additional light, by the conceptions of another man, clearly and plainly expressed, and by such expression conveyed to his apprehension. And

he again, whose nature subjects him to want and weakness, and consequently to hopes and fears, cannot but be moved this way, or that way, according as objects suitable to those passions, shall be dextrously represented, and set before his imagination, by the arts of speaking; which is that that we call *persuasion*. And lastly, he whose soul and body receive their activity from, and perform all their functions by, the meditation of the spirits, which ebb and flow, consume, and are renewed again, cannot but find himself very uneasy upon any tedious, verbose application made to him: And that sometimes to such a degree, that through mere fatigue, and even against judgment and interest both, a man shall surrender himself as a conquered person, to the over-bearing vehemence of such sollicitations: For when they ply him so fast, and pour in upon him so thick, they cannot but wear and waste the spirits, as unequal to so pertinacious a charge; and this is properly to weary a man. But now all weariness, we know, presupposes weakness; and consequently every long, importunate, wearisome petition is truly and properly a force upon him, that is pursued with it; it is a following blow after blow upon the mind and affections, and may, for the time, pass for real, though short persecution.

This

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 137

This is the state and condition of human nature; and prolixity or importunity of speech is still the great engine to attack it by, either in its *blind* or *weak* side: And I think I may venture to affirm, that it is seldom that any man is prevailed upon by words, but upon a true and philosophical estimate of the whole matter, he is either *deceived* or *wearied*, before he is so, and parts with the thing desired of him upon the very same terms, that either a child parts with a jewel for an apple, or a man parts with his sword, when it is forcibly wrested, or took from him. And that he who obtains what he has been rhetorically or importunately begging for, goes away really a conqueror, and triumphantly carrying off the spoils of his neighbour's understanding, or his will; baffling the former, or wearying the latter, into a grant of his restless petitions.

And now, if this be the case, when any one comes with a tedious, long-winded harangue to God, may not God properly answer him with those words in *Psal.* l. 21. *Surely thou thinkest I am altogether such an one as thyself?* And perhaps, upon a due and rational examination of all the follies and indecencies that men are apt to be guilty of in prayer, they will be all found resolvable into this one thing, as the true and sole cause of them; namely,
That

That men, when they pray, take God to be such an one as themselves ; and so treat him accordingly : The malignity and mischief of which gross mistake may reach farther than possibly at first they can well be aware of. For if it be idolatry to pray to God the Father, represented under the shape of a man, can it be at all better to pray to him as represented under the weakness of a man ? Nay, if the misrepresentation of the object makes the idolatry, certainly by how much the worse, and more scandalous the misrepresentation is, by so much the grosser and more intolerable must be the idolatry. To confirm which, we may add this consideration, that Christ himself, even now in his glorified estate in heaven, wears the body, and consequently the shape, of a man, though he is far from any of his infirmities or imperfections : And therefore, no doubt, to represent God to ourselves under these latter, must needs be more absurd and irreligious, than to represent him under the former. But to one particular of the preceding discourse some may reply and object ; that if God's omniscience, by rendering it impossible for him to be informed, be a sufficient reason against prolixity, or length of prayer ; it will follow, that it is equally a reason against the using any words at all in prayer ; since the
proper

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 139

proper use of words is to inform the person whom we speak to ; and consequently, where information is impossible, words must needs be useless and superfluous.

To which I answer, First by concession, that if the *sole* use of words, or speech, were to *inform the person whom we speak to*, the consequence would be firm and good, and equally conclude against the use of any words at all in prayer. But therefore, in the second place, I deny information to be the sole and adequate use of words or speech, or indeed any use of them at all, when either the person spoken to needs not to be informed, and withal is known not to need it, as sometimes it falls out with men ; or, when he is incapable of being informed, as it is always with God. But the proper use of words, whenever we speak to God in prayer, is thereby to pay him *honour* and *obedience*. God having, by an express precept, enjoined us the use of words in prayer, commanding us in *Psal.* l. 15. and many other Scriptures, *to call upon him* : and in *Luke* xi. 21. *When we pray, to say, Our Father, &c.* But no where has he commanded us to do this with prolixity, or multiplicity of words. And though it must be confessed, that we may sometimes answer this command of calling upon God, and saying, *Our Father, &c.*
by

by mental or inward prayer ; yet since these words, in their first and most proper signification, import a vocal address, there is no doubt, but the direct design of the command is to enjoin this also, wheresoever there is ability and power to perform it. So that we see here the necessity of *vocal prayer*, founded upon the authority of a divine precept ; whereas, for *long prolix prayer*, no such precept can be produced ; and consequently, the divine omniscience may be a sufficient reason against multiplicity of words in prayer, and yet conclude nothing simply or absolutely against the bare use of them. Nevertheless, that we may not seem to alledge bare command, unseconded by reason, (which yet, in the divine commands, it is impossible to do) there is this great reason for, and use of words in prayer, without the least pretence of informing the person whom we pray to ; and that is, to *acknowledge and own those wants* before God, that we supplicate for a relief of. It being very proper and rational to own and acknowledge a thing even to him, who knew it before : Forasmuch as this is so far from offering to communicate, or make known to him the thing so acknowledged, that it rather presupposes in him an antecedent knowledge of it, and comes in only as a subsequent assent and subscription to the

the

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 141

the reality and truth of such a knowledge. For to *acknowledge* a thing in the first sense of the word, does by no means signify a design of notifying that thing to another, but is truly and properly a man's passing sentence upon himself, and his own condition: there being no reason in the world for a man to expect that God should relieve and supply those wants, that he himself will not own or take notice of; any more than for a man to hope for a pardon of those sins, that he cannot find in his heart to confess. And yet (I suppose) no man in his right senses does, or can imagine, that God is informed, or brought to the knowledge of those sins, by any such confession.

And so much for the clearing of this objection; and, in the whole, for the first argument produced by us, *for brevity, and against prolixity* of prayer; namely, *That all the reasons that can be assigned for prolixity of speech in our converse with men, cease, and become no reasons for it at all, when we are to speak or pray to God.*

2. The second argument for *paucity of words* in prayer, shall be taken from the *paucity* of *those things* that are necessary to be prayed for. And surely, where few things are necessary, few words should be sufficient; for where the *matter* is not commensurate to the words, all
speak-

speaking is but tautology; that being truly and really tautology, where the same thing is repeated though under never so much variety of expression; as it is but the same man still, though he appears every day, or every hour, in a new and different suit of cloaths.

The adequate subject of our prayers (I shew'd at first) comprehended in it *things of necessity*, and *things of charity*. As to the first of which, I know nothing absolutely necessary, but *grace* here, and *glory* hereafter. And for the other, we know what the apostle says, 1 *Tim.* vi. 8. *Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* Nature is satisfied with a little, and Grace with less. And now, if the matter of our prayers lies within so narrow a compass, why should the dress and outside of them spread and diffuse itself into so wide and disproportioned a largeness? By reason of which, our words will be forced to hang loose and light, without any matter to support them; much after the same rate, that it is said to be in transubstantiation; where *accidents* are left in the lurch by their proper *subject*, that gives them the slip, and so leaves those poor slender beings to uphold and shift for themselves.

In brevity of speech, a man does not so much speak words, as things; things in their precise and naked truth, and stripped of their rhetorical

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 143

rical mask, and their fallacious gloss: And therefore, in *Athens* they circumscribed the pleadings of their orators by a strict law, cutting off prologues and epilogues, and commanding them to an immediate representation of the case, by an impartial and succinct declaration of mere matter of fact. And this was indeed, to speak things fit for a judge to hear, because it argued the pleader also a judge of what was fit for him to speak.

And now why should not this be both decency and devotion too, when we come to plead for our poor souls before the great Tribunal of heaven? It was the saying of *Solomon*, *A word to the wise*; and if so, certainly there can be no necessity of many words to Him, who is Wisdom itself. For, can any man think, that God delights to hear him make speeches, and to shew his parts, (as the word is) or to jumble a multitude of misapplied Scripture-sentences together, interlarded with a frequent, nauseous repetition of *Ab Lord!* which some call *exercising their gifts*, but with a greater exercise of their hearers patience? Nay, does not he present his Maker not only with a more decent, but also more free and liberal oblation, who tenders him much in a little, and brings him his whole heart and soul wrapt up in three or four words, than he who
with

with full mouth, and loud lungs, sends up whole vollies of articulate breath to the throne of grace? For neither in the esteem of God, or man, ought multitude of words to pass for any more: In the present case, no doubt, God accounts and accepts of the former, as infinitely a more valuable offering than the latter. As that subject pays his prince a much nobler and more acceptable tribute, who tenders him a purse of gold, than he who brings him a whole cart-load of farthings; in which there is weight without worth, and number without account.

3. The third argument for brevity, or contractedness of speech in prayer, shall be taken from the very nature and condition of the person who prays; which makes it impossible for him to keep up the same fervour and attention in a long prayer, that he may in a short. For, as I first observed that the mind of man cannot with the same force and vigour attend two several objects at the same time; so neither can it with the same force and earnestness exert itself upon one and the same object for any long time. Great intention of mind spending the spirits too fast, to continue its first freshness and agility long. For while the soul is a retainer to the elements, and a sojourner in the body, it must be content to submit its own quick-

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 145

quickness and spirituality to the dulness of its vehicle, and to comply with the pace of its inferior companion. Just like a man shut up in a coach; who, while he is so, must be willing to go no faster than the motion of the coach will carry him. He who does all by the help of those subtle, refined parts of matter, called spirits, must not think to persevere at the same pitch of acting, while those principles of activity flag. No man begins and ends a long journey with the same pace.

But now, when prayer has lost its due fervour and attention, (which indeed are the very vitals of it) it is but the *carcass* of a prayer; and consequently, must needs be loathsome and offensive to God: nay, though the greatest part of it should be enlivened and carried on with an actual attention; yet, if that attention fails to enliven any one part of it, the whole is but a joining of the *living* and the *dead* together; for which conjunction, the *dead* is not at all the better, but the *living* very much the worse. It is not length, nor copiousness of language, that is devotion, any more than bulk and bigness is valour, or *flesh* the measure of the *spirit*. A short sentence may be oftentimes a large and a mighty prayer. Devotion so managed, being like water in a well, where you have fulness in a little compass; which

surely is much nobler, than the same carried out into many petit, creeping rivulets, with *length* and *shallowness* together. Let him who prays, bestow all that strength, fervour and attention, upon shortness and significance, that would otherwise run out, and lose itself in length and luxuriancy of speech to no purpose. Let not his tongue out-strip his heart; nor presume to carry a message to the throne of grace, while that stays behind. Let him not think to support so hard and weighty a duty with a tired, languishing, and bejaded devotion: To avoid which, let a man contract his expression, where he cannot enlarge his affection; still remembering, that nothing can be more absurd in itself, nor more unacceptable to God, than for one engaged in the great work of prayer, to hold on *speaking*, after he has left off *praying*; and to keep the *lips* at work, when the *spirit* can do no more.

4. The fourth argument for shortness, or conciseness of speech in prayer, shall be drawn from this, that it is the most natural and lively way of expressing the utmost agonies and outcries of the soul to God upon a quick, pungent sense, either of a pressing necessity, or an approaching calamity; which, we know, are generally the chief occasions of prayer, and the most effectual motives to bring men upon their

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 147

their knees, in a vigorous application of themselves to this great duty. A person ready to sink under his wants, has neither time, nor heart, to rhetoricate, or make flourishes. No man begins a long grace, when he is ready to starve: Such an one's prayers are like the relief he needs, quick and sudden, short and immediate: He is like a man in torture upon the rack; whose pains are too acute to let his words be many; and whose desires of deliverance too impatient to delay the thing he begs for, by the manner of his begging it.

It is a common saying; *If a man does not know how to pray, let him go to sea, and that will teach him.* And we have a notable instance of what kind of prayers men are taught in that school, even in the disciples themselves, when a storm arose, and the sea raged, and the ship was ready to be cast away, in the 8th of *Matthew*. In which case, we do not find that they fell presently to harangue it about seas and winds, and that dismal face of things that must needs appear all over the devouring element at such a time: All which, and the like, might, no doubt, have been very plentiful topicks of eloquence to a man, who should have look'd upon these things from the shore; or discoursed of wrecks and tempests safe and warm in his parlour. But these poor

L 2

wretches,

wretches, who were now entring (as they thought) into the very jaws of death, struggling with the last efforts of nature, upon the sense of a departing life; and consequently, could neither speak nor think any thing low or ordinary in such a condition, presently rallied up, and discharged the whole concern of their desponding souls in that short prayer, of but three words, though much fuller, and more forcible, than one of three thousand, in the 25th verse of the fore-mentioned chapter; *Save us, Lord, or we perish.* Death makes short work when it comes, and will teach him, who would prevent it, to make shorter. For surely no man, who thinks himself a perishing, can be at leisure to be eloquent; or judge it either sense or devotion, to begin a long prayer, when, in all likelihood, he shall conclude his life before it.

5. The fifth and last argument that I shall produce for *brevity of speech*, or *fewness of words* in prayer, shall be taken from the examples which we find in Scripture, of such as have been remarkable for *brevity*, and of such as have been noted for *prolixity of speech*, in the discharge of this duty.

1. And first for *brevity*. To omit all those notable examples, which the *Old Testament* affords

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 149

affords us of it; and to confine ourselves only to the *New*, in which we are undoubtedly most concerned. Was not this way of praying not only warranted, but sanctified, and set above all that the will of man could possibly except against it, by that infinitely exact form of prayer, prescribed by the greatest, the holiest, and the wisest man that ever lived, even Christ himself, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world? Was it not an instance both of the truest devotion, and the fullest and most comprehensive reason, that ever proceeded from the mouth of man? And yet withal, the shortest, and most succinct model, that ever grasped all the needs and occasions of mankind, both spiritual and temporal, into so small a compass? Doubtless, had our Saviour thought fit to amplify or be prolix, *He, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom*, could not want matter, nor he who was himself *the word*, want variety of the fittest to have expressed his mind by. But he chose rather to contract the whole concern of both worlds into a few lines, and to unite both heaven and earth in his prayer, as he had done before in his person. And indeed one was a kind of copy or representation of the other.

So then, we see here brevity in the *rule* or *pattern*, let us see it next in the *practice*, and after that, in the *success* of prayer. And, first,

we have the practice, as well as the pattern of it, in our Saviour himself; and that, in the most signal passage of his whole life, even his preparation for his approaching death. In which dolorous scene, when his whole soul was nothing but sorrow, (that great moving spring of invention and elocution) and when nature was put to its last and utmost stretch, and so had no refuge or relief but in prayer; yet even then, all his horror, agony, and distress of spirit delivers itself but in two very short sentences, in *Matth. xxvi. 39. O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* And again, the second time, with the like brevity, and the like words. *O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.* And lastly, the third time also, he used the same short form again; and yet in all this, he was (as we may say, without a metaphor) even praying *for life*; so far as the great business he was then about, to wit, the redemption of the world, would suffer him to pray for it. All which prayers of our Saviour, and others of like brevity, are properly such as we call *Ejaculations*; an elegant similitude from a dart, or arrow, shot, or thrown out; and such an one (we know) of a yard long, will fly farther, and strike deeper, than one of twenty.

And

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 151

And then, in the last place, for the success of such brief prayers; I shall give you but three instances of this, but they shall be of persons praying under the pressure of as great miseries, as human nature could well be afflicted with. And the first shall be of the Leper, *Matth. viii. 2.* or, as *St. Luke* describes him, *a man full of leprosy, who came to our Saviour, and worshipped him*; and, as *St. Luke* again has it more particularly, *fell on his face before him*, (which is the lowest and most devout of all postures of worship) *saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* This was all his prayer: And the answer to it was, That he was immediately cleansed. The next instance shall be of the poor *blind man*, in *Luke xviii. 28.* following our Saviour with this earnest prayer: *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.* His whole prayer was no more: For it is said in the next *verse*, that he went on, repeating it again and again: *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.* And the answer he received was, that his eyes were opened, and his sight restored.

The third and last instance shall be of the *Publican*, in the same chapter of *St. Luke*; praying under a lively sense of as great a leprosy, and blindness of soul, as the other two could have of body. In the 13th verse, *he*

smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. He spoke no more; though 'tis in the 10th verse, that he went solemnly and purposely up to the temple to pray: The issue and success of which prayer was, that he went home justified, before one of those, whom all the Jewish church revered as absolutely the highest and most heroick examples of piety, and most beloved favourites of heaven, in the whole world. And now, if the force and virtue of these short prayer could rise so high, as to cleanse a leper, to give sight to the blind, and to justify a Publican; and, if the worth of a prayer may at all be measured by the success of it, I suppose, no prayers whatsoever can do more; and, I never yet heard or read of any long prayer that did so much. Which brings on the other part of this our fifth and last argument, which was to be drawn from the examples of such as have been noted in scripture for prolixity or length of prayer. And of this, there are only two mentioned; The Heathens and the Pharisees. The first, the grand instance of idolatry; the other, of hypocrisy: But Christ forbids us the imitation of both; when ye pray, says our Saviour in the vith of Matthew, be ye not like the Heathens: But in what? Why, in this, that they think they shall be heard for their much speaking, in the

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 153

7th verse. It is not the multitude, that prevails in armies, and much less in words. And then for the *Pharisees*, whom our Saviour represents as the very vilest of men, and the greatest of cheats; we have them amusing the world with pretences of a more refin'd devotion, while their heart was that time in their neighbour's coffers. For does not our Saviour expressly tell us, in *Luke* xx. and the two last verses, that the great tools, the hooks or engines, by which they compass'd their worst, their wickedest, and most rapacious designs, were *long prayers*? Prayers made only for a *shew* or colour; and that, to the basest and most degenerate sort of villany, even the robbing the spital, and *devouring the houses* of poor, helpless, forlorn widows. Their devotion served all along but as an instrument to their avarice, as a factor or under-agent to their extortion. A practice, which, duly seen into, and stript of its hypocritical blinds, could not but look very odiously and ill-favour'dly; and therefore, in come their *long robes*, and their *long prayers* together, and cover all. And the truth is, neither the length of one, nor of the other, is ever found so useful, as when there is something more than ordinary that would not be seen. This was the *gainful godliness* of the *Pharisees*; and, I believe upon good observation,

fervoration, you will hardly find, any like the *Pharisees* for their long prayers, who are not also extremely like them for something else. And thus having given you five arguments for *brevity*, and against *prolixity* of prayer; let us now make this our *other great rule*, whereby to judge of the prayers of *our church*, and the prayers of those who *dissent* and *divide* from it. And,

First, For that excellent body of prayers contained in our liturgy, and both compiled and enjoined by publick authority. Have we not here a great instance of brevity and fullness together, cast into several short, significant collects, each containing a distinct, intire, and well-managed petition? The whole sett of them being like a string of pearls, exceeding rich in conjunction; and therefore of no small price or value, even single, and by themselves. Nothing could have been composed with greater judgment; every prayer being so short, that it is impossible it should weary; and withal, so pertinent, that it is impossible it should cloy the devotion. And indeed, so admirably fitted are they all to the common concerns of a christian society, that when the rubrick enjoins but the use of some of them, our worship is not imperfect; and when we use them all, there is none of them superfluous.

And

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 155

And the reason assigned by some learned men for the preference of many short prayers, before a continued long one, is unanswerable; namely, that by the former there is a more frequently repeated mention made of the name, and some great attribute of God as the encouraging ground of our praying to him; and withal, of the merits and mediation of Christ, as the only thing that can promise us success, in what we pray for; every distinct petition *beginning* with the *former*, and *ending* with the *latter*: By thus annexing of which to each particular thing that we ask for, we do manifestly confess and declare, that we cannot expect to obtain any one thing at the hands of God, but with a particular renewed respect to the merits of a Mediator; and withal, remind the congregation of the same, by making it their part to renew a distinct *Amen* to every distinct *Petition*.

Add to this the excellent contrivance of a great part of our Liturgy into alternate responses; by which means, the people are put to bear a considerable share in the whole service: which makes it almost impossible for them, to be only idle hearers, or, which is worse, mere lookers on: As they are very often, and may be always (if they can but keep their eyes open) at the long, tedious prayers
of

of the *Nonconformists*. And this indeed is that which makes and denominates our Liturgy truly and properly a book of *Common-Prayer*. For, I think I may truly avouch (how strange soever it may seem at first) that there is no such thing as *Common*, or *Joint-prayer*, any where amongst the principal dissenters from the church of *England*: For, in the *Romish* communion, the priest says over the appointed prayers only to himself, and the rest of the people not hearing a word of what he says, repeat also their own particular prayers to themselves; and when they have done, go their way: Not all at once, as neither do they come at once, but scatteringly, one after another, according as they have finished their devotions. And then for the *Nonconformists*; their prayers being all *extempore*, it is (as we have shewn before) hardly possible for *any*, and utterly impossible for *all* to join in them. For, surely, people cannot join in a prayer before they understand it; nor can it be imagined, that all capacities should presently and immediately understand what they *hear*, when, possibly, the *bolder-forth* himself understands not what he *says*. From all which we may venture to conclude, that that excellent thing, *Common-prayer*, which is the joint address of a whole congregation, with united voice as well as heart,

Serm.4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 157

heart, sending up their devotions to Almighty God, is no-where to be found in these kingdoms, but in that best and nearest copy of primitive christian worship, the divine service, as it is performed according to the orders of our church.

As for those long prayers, so frequently used by some before their sermons, the constitution and canons of our church are not at all responsible for them; having provided us better things, and with great wisdom appointed a form of prayer, to be used by all before their sermons. But as for this way of praying, now generally in use, as it was first took up upon an humour of novelty and popularity, and by the same carried on, till it had passed into a custom, and so put the rule of the church first out of use, and then out of countenance also; so, if it be rightly considered, it will, in the very nature of the thing itself, be found a very senseless and absurd practice. For, can there be any sense or propriety in beginning a new, tedious prayer in the pulpit, just after the church has, for near an hour together, with great variety of offices, suitable to all the needs of the congregation, been praying for all that can possibly be fit for christians to pray for? Nothing certainly can be more irrational. For which cause, amongst many more, that
old

old sober form of *bidding prayer*, which, both against law and reason, has been justled out of the church by this upstart, puritanical encroachment, ought, with great reason, to be restored by authority; and both the use and users of it, by a strict and solemn reinforcement of the canon upon all, without exception, be rescued from that unjust scorn of the factious and ignorant, which the tyranny of the contrary, usurping custom, will otherwise expose them to. For surely, it can neither be decency nor order for our clergy to conform to the fanatics, as many in their prayers before sermon now-a-days do.

And thus having accounted for the prayers of our church, according to the great rule prescribed in the *text*, *Let thy words be few*: Let us now, according to the same, consider also the way of praying, so much used, and applauded by such as have renounced the communion, and liturgy of our church; it is but reason, that they should bring us something better in the room of what they have so disdainfully cast off. But, on the contrary, are not all their prayers exactly after the *beathenish* and *pharisaical* copy? Always notable for those two things, length and tautology? Two whole hours for one prayer, at a fast, used to be reckoned but a moderate dose; and that, for the

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 159

the most part, fraught with such irreverent, blasphemous expressions, that, to repeat them, would profane the place I am speaking in; and indeed, they seldom *carried on the work of such a day* (as their phrase was) but they left the church in need of a new consecration. Add to this, the incoherence and confusion, the endless repetitions, and the insufferable nonsense, that never failed to hold out, even with their utmost prolixity; so that in all their *long fasts*, from first to last, from *seven* in the morning, to *seven* in the evening, (which was their measure) the pulpit was always the *emptiest* thing in the church: And I never knew such a *fast* kept by them, but their hearers had cause to begin a *thanksgiving*, as soon as they had done. And the truth is, when I consider the matter of their prayers; so full of ramble, and inconsequence, and in every respect, so very like the language of a dream; and compare it with their carriage of themselves in prayer, with their eyes for the most part shut, and their arms stretched out in a yawning posture, a man that should hear any of them pray, might, by a very pardonable error, be induced to think, that he was all the time hearing one *talking in his sleep*: besides the strange virtue which their prayers had to procure sleep in others too. So that he who
should

should be present at all their long cant, would shew a greater ability in *watching*, than ever they could pretend to in *praying*, if he could forbear sleeping, having so strong a provocation to it, and so fair an excuse for it. In a word, such were their prayers, both for matter and expression, that, could any one truly and exactly write them out, it would be the shrewdest, and most effectual way of writing against them, that could possibly be thought of.

I should not have thus troubled either you, or myself, by raking into the dirt and dunghill of these men's devotions, upon the account of any thing, either done or said by them in the late times of confusion; for as they have the *king's*, so I wish them *God's pardon also*, whom I am sure, they have offended much more, than they have both kings put together. But that which has provoked me thus to rip up, and expose to you their nauseous, and ridiculous way of addressing to God, even upon the most solemn occasions, is that intolerably rude and unprovoked insolence and scurrility, with which they are every day reproaching and scoffing at our liturgy, and the users of it, and thereby alienating the minds of the people from it, to such a degree, that many thousands are drawn by them into a fatal schism; a schism that, unrepented of, and continued in,
will

Serm. 4. *long Extempore Prayers.* 161

will as infallibly ruin their souls, as theft, whoredom, murder, or any other of the most crying, damning sins whatsoever. But leaving this to the justice of the government, to which it belongs, to protect us in our spiritual, as well as in our temporal concerns, I shall only say this, that nothing can be more for the honour of our liturgy, than to find it despised only by those who have made themselves remarkable to the world for despising the *Lord's Prayer* as much.

In the mean time, for ourselves of the church of *England*, who, without pretending to any new lights, think it equally a duty and commendation to be *wise*, and to be *devout* only to *sobriety*, and who judge it no dishonour to God himself, to be worshipped according to law and rule: If the directions of *Solomon*, the precept and example of our Saviour; and lastly, the piety and experience of those excellent men and martyrs, who first composed, and afterwards owned our liturgy with their dearest blood, may be look'd upon as safe and sufficient guides to us in our publick worship of God; then, upon the joint authority of all these, we may pronounce our liturgy the greatest treasure of rational devotion in the christian world. And I know no prayer necessary, that is not in the liturgy, but one: which is

this: *That God would vouchsafe to continue the liturgy itself in use, honour, and veneration in this church for ever.* And I doubt not, but all wise, sober, and good christians will, with equal judgment and affection, give it their *Amen.*

Now to GOD the FATHER, GOD the SON, and GOD the HOLY GHOST, three Persons and one GOD, be render'd and ascribed, as is most due, all Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

*Of the heinous Guilt of taking Pleasure
in other Mens Sins;*

A

S E R M O N

Preached upon

R O M A N S I. 32.

M 2

SER-

Se

=
=

S

C

—

Wh

R

diat

log

in i

mit

to l

redu

SERMON V.

Of the heinous Guilt of taking
Pleasure in other Mens Sins.

R O M. i. 32.

Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

FR O M the beginning of the 18th *verse*, to the end of the 31st, (the *verse* immediately going before the *text*) we have a catalogue of the blackest sins, that human nature, in its highest depravation, is capable of committing, and this so perfect, that there seems to be no sin imaginable, but what may be reduced to, and comprised under, some of the

166 *Of taking pleasure in* Serm. 5.

sins here specified. In a word, we have an
 abridgment of the lives and practices of the
 whole heathen world ; that is, of all the base-
 ness and villainy, that both the corruption of
 nature, and the instigation of the devil, could
 for so many ages, by all the arts and opportu-
 nities, all the motives and incentives of sin-
 ning, bring the sons of men to. And yet, as
 full and comprehensive as this catalogue of sin
 seems to be, it is but of sin under a limitation :
 An universality of sin under a certain kind ;
 that is, of all sins of *direct* and *personal* com-
 mission. And, you will say, is not this a suf-
 ficient comprehension of all ? For, is not a
 man's person the compass of his actions ? Or,
 can he operate further, than he does exist ?
 Why, yes, in some sense he may : He may
 not only *commit such and such sins himself, but*
also take pleasure in others, that do commit them.
 Which expression implies these two things :
 First, that thus *to take pleasure in other mens*
sins, is a *distinct* sin from all the former ; and,
 Secondly, that it is much *greater* than the
 former : Forasmuch as these terms, *not only do*
the same, but take pleasure, &c. import aggra-
 vation, as well as *distinction* ; and are properly
 an advance *a minore ad majus*, a progress to a
 farther degree. And this, indeed, is the far-
 thest that human pravity can reach, the high-
est

est point of villainy, that the debauch'd powers of man's mind can ascend unto. For, surely, that sin that exceeds *idolatry, monstrous unnatural lusts, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, deceit, back-biting, hatred of God, spitefulness, pride, disobedience to parents, covenant-breaking, want of natural affection, implacableness, unmercifulness, and the like*: I say, that sin, that is a pitch beyond all these, must needs be such an one, as must non-plus the devil himself, to proceed further: it is the very extremity, the fulness, and the concluding period of sin, the last line, and the finishing stroke of the devil's image drawn upon the soul of man.

Now the sense of the words may be fully and naturally cast into this one proposition, which shall be the subject of the following discourse, *viz.*

That the guilt arising from a man's delighting, or taking pleasure in other mens sins, or (which is all one) in other men for their sins, is greater than he can possibly contract by a commission of the same sins in his own person.

For the handling of which, I cannot but think it superfluous, to offer at any explication of what it is *to take pleasure in other mens sins*; it being impossible for any man to be so far unacquainted with the motions and operations

168 *Of taking pleasure in* Sermon 5.

of his own mind, as not to know how it is affected and disposed, when any thing pleases or delights him. And therefore I shall state the prosecution of the proposition upon these following things.

I. I shall shew *what it is* that brings a man to such a disposition of mind, *as to take pleasure in other mens sins.*

II. I shall shew the reasons, *Why* a man's being disposed to do so, comes to be attended with such an extraordinary guilt: And,

III. And Lastly, I shall declare *what kind of persons* are to be reckoned under this character.

Of each of which in their order.

And first for the

I. Of these, *What it is that brings a man, &c.*

In order to which, I shall premise these four considerations.

1. That every man naturally has a distinguishing sense of *turpe* & *honestum*; of what is *honest*, and what is *dishonest*; of what is fit, and what is not fit to be done. There are those practical principles and rules of action, treasured up in that part of man's mind, called by the schools *συνησις*, that, like the *candle of the Lord*, set up by God himself in the heart of every man, discovers to him, both what he

is

is to do, and what to avoid: they are *a light, lighting every man that cometh into the world.*

And in respect of which principally it is, that God is said not to have *left himself without witness* in the world; there being something fix'd in the nature of man, that will be sure to testify and declare for him.

2. The second thing to be consider'd, is, that there is consequently upon this distinguishing principle an inward satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, arising in the heart of every man, after he has done a good or an evil action; an action agreeable to, or deviating from, this great rule. And this, no doubt, proceeds not only from the real unsuitableness, that every thing sinful or dishonest bears to the nature of man, but also from a secret, inward, fore-boding fear, that some evil or other will follow the doing of that, which a man's own conscience disallows him in. For no man naturally is, or can be chearful immediately upon the doing of a wicked action: there being something within him, that presently gives sentence against him for it: which, no question, is the voice of God himself, speaking in the hearts of men, whether they understand it or no; and by secret intimations giving the sinner a fore-taste of that direful cup, which he is like to drink more deeply of hereafter.

3. The

3. The third thing to be consider'd, is, that this distinguishing *sense of good and evil*, and this satisfaction and dissatisfaction of mind, consequent upon a man's acting suitably, or unsuitably to it, is a principle neither presently, nor easily, to be worn out, or extinguished. For besides, that it is founded in nature, (which kind of things are always most durable and lasting) the great important end that God designs it for (which is no less than the government of the noblest part of the world, mankind) sufficiently shews the necessity of its being rooted deep in the heart, and put beyond the danger of being torn up by an ordinary violence done to it.

4. The fourth and last thing to be consider'd, is, that that which weakens, and directly tends to extinguish this principle, (so far as 'tis capable of being extinguished) is an inferior, sensitive principle, which receives its gratifications from objects clean contrary to the former; and which affect a man, in the state of this present life, much more warmly and vividly than those, which affect only his nobler part, his *mind*. So that there being a contrariety between those things, that conscience inclines to, and those that entertain the senses; and since the more quick and affecting pleasure still arises from these latter, it follows, that
the

the gratifications of these are more powerful to command the principles of action, than the other, and consequently are, for the most part, too hard for, and victorious over the dictates of right reason.

Now from these four considerations, thus premised, we naturally infer these two things.

First, That no man is quickly or easily brought to take a full pleasure and delight in his own sins. For, though sin offers itself in never so pleasing and alluring a dress, at first, yet the remorse, and inward regrets of the soul, upon the commission of it, infinitely over-balance those faint and transient gratifications it affords the senses. So that, upon the whole matter, the sinner, even at his highest pitch of enjoyment, is not pleased with it so much, but he is afflicted more. And, as long as these inward revolts and recoilings of the mind continue, (which they will certainly do for a considerable part of a man's life) the sinner will find his accounts of pleasure very poor and short; being so mixed, and indeed over-done with the contrary impressions of trouble upon his mind, that it is but a bitter-sweet at best; and the fine colours of the serpent do by no means make amends for the smart and poison of his sting.

Secondly,

Secondly, The other thing to be inferred, is, that, as no man is quickly, or easily brought to take a full pleasure or delight in his own sins, so much less easily can he be brought to take pleasure in those of other men. The reason is, because the chief motive (as we have observed) that induces a man to sin, which is the gratification of his sensitive part by a sinful act, cannot be had from the sins of another man; *since* naturally, and directly, they affect only the agent that commits them. For certainly another man's intemperance cannot affect my sensuality, any more than the meat and drink that I take into my mouth, can please his palate: But of this more fully in some of the following particulars.

In the mean time, it is evident from reason, that there is a considerable difficulty in a man's arriving to such a disposition of mind, as shall make him take pleasure in other mens sins; and yet it is also as evident from the text, and from experience too, that some men are brought to do so. And therefore, since there is no effect, of what kind soever, but is resolvable into some cause, we will inquire into the cause of this vile and preternatural temper of mind, that should make a man please himself with that, which can no ways reach or affect those faculties and principles, which nature has made
the

the proper seat and subject of pleasure. Now the causes (or at least some of the causes) that debauch and corrupt the mind of man to such a degree, as to take pleasure in other mens sins, are these five.

I. A commission of the same sins in a man's own person. This is imported in the very words of the text; where it is said of such persons, that *they not only do the same things*; which must therefore imply, *that they do them*. It is conversation, and acquaintance, that must give delight in things and actions, as well as in persons. And it is trial that must begin the acquaintance: it being hardly imaginable, that one should be delighted with a sin at *second hand*, till he has known it *at the first*. Delight is the natural result of practice and experiment; and when it flows from any thing else, so far it recedes from nature. None look with so much pleasure upon the works of art, as those who are artists themselves. They are therefore their delight, because they were heretofore their employment; and they love to see such things, because they once loved to do them. In like manner, a man must sin himself into a love of other mens sins; for a bare notion or speculation of this black art will not carry him so far. No sober, temperate person in the world

world (whatsoever other sins he may be inclinable to, and guilty of) can look with any complacency upon the drunkenness and fottishness of his neighbours: Nor can any chaste person (be his other failings what they will) reflect with any pleasure or delight, upon the filthy, unclean conversation of another, though never so much in fashion, and vouched not by common use only, but applause. No; he must be first an exercised, thorough-paced practitioner of these vices himself; and they must have endeared themselves to him by those personal gratifications he had received from them, before he can come to like them so far, as to be pleased, and enamoured with them, wheresoever he sees them. It is possible indeed, that a sober, or a chaste person, upon the stock of *ill-will*, *envy*, or *spiritual pride*, (which is all the religion that some have) may be glad to see the intemperance and debauchery of some about him: But it is impossible, that such persons should take any delight in the men themselves for being so. The truth is, in such a case, they do not properly delight in the vice itself, though they inwardly rejoice (and *after a godly sort*, no doubt) to see another guilty of it; but they delight in the mischief and disaster, which, they know, it will
 afflu-

assuredly bring upon him, whom they hate, and wish ill to: They rejoice not in it, as in a delightful object, but as in a cause and means of their neighbour's ruin. So grateful, nay, so delicious are even the horridest villainies, committed by others, to the *Pharisaical* piety of some; who, in the mean time, can be wholly unconcerned for the reproach brought thereby upon the name of God, and the honour of Religion, so long as by the same their sanctified spleen is gratified in their brother's infamy and destruction.

This therefore we may reckon upon, that scarce any man passes to a liking of sin in others, but by first practising it himself; and consequently may take it for a shrewd indication, and sign, whereby to judge of the manners of those, who have sinned with too much art and caution to suffer the eye of the world to charge some sins directly upon their conversation. For, tho' such kind of men have lived never so much upon the reserve, as to their personal behaviour, yet if they be observ'd to have a particular delight in, and fondness for *persons* noted for any sort of sin, it is ten to one, but there was a communication in the sin, before there was so in affection. The man has, by this, directed us to a copy of himself; and,

and, though we cannot always come to a sight of the original, yet by a true copy we may know all *that is in it*.

2. A second cause that brings a man to take pleasure in other mens sins, is not only a commission of those sins in his own person, but also a commission of them against the full light and conviction of his conscience. For this also is expressed in the text; where the persons charged with this wretched disposition of mind are said to have been such *as knew the judgment of God, that they, who committed such things, were worthy of death*. They knew that there was a righteous and a searching law, directly forbidding such practices; and they knew that it carried with it the divine stamp, that it was the *Law of God*; they knew also, that the sanction of it was under the greatest and dreadfulest of all penalties, *death*. And this surely (one would think) was knowledge enough to have opened both a man's eyes, and his heart too; his eyes to see, and his heart to consider the intolerable mischief that the commission of the sin set before him must infallibly plunge him into. Nevertheless, the persons here mentioned were resolved to venture, and to commit the sin, even while conscience stood protesting against it. They were such as broke through all mounds of law, such as laugh'd

laugh'd at the *sword of vengeance*, which Divine Justice brandished in their faces. For, we must know, that God has set a *flaming sword* not only before *paradise*, but before *hell* itself also; to keep men out of this, as well as out of the other. And conscience is the *angel* into whose hand this sword is put. But if now, the sinner shall not only *wrestle* with this *angel*, but *throw* him too; and win so complete a victory over his conscience, that all these considerations shall be able to strike no terror into his mind, lay no restraint upon his lusts, no controul upon his appetites; he is certainly too strong for the means of grace; and his heart lies open, like a broad and high road, for all the sin and villainy in the world freely to pass through.

The truth is, if we impartially consider the nature of these *sins against conscience*, we shall find them such strange paradoxes, that a man must baulk all common principles, and act contrary to the natural way and motive of all human actions, in the commission of them. For that which naturally moves a man to do any thing, must be the apprehension and expectation of some good from the thing, which he is about to do: And that which naturally keeps a man from doing of a thing, must be the apprehension and fear of some mischief

likely to ensue from that thing, or action, that he is ready to engage in. But now, for a man to do a thing, while his conscience, the best light that he has to judge by, assures him, that he shall be infinitely, unsupportably miserable, if he does it; this is certainly unnatural, and (one would imagine) impossible.

And therefore, so far as one may judge, while a man acts against his conscience, he acts by a principle of direct *infidelity*, and does not really believe that those things, that God has thus threatened, shall ever come to pass. For, tho' he may yield a general faint assent to the truth of those propositions, as they stand recorded in Scripture; yet, for a thorough, practical belief, that those general propositions shall be particularly made good upon his person, no doubt, for the time that he is sinning against conscience, such a belief has no place in his mind. Which being so, it is easy to conceive, how ready and disposed this must needs leave the soul, to admit of any, even the most horrid, unnatural proposals, that the devil himself can suggest: For conscience being once extinct, and the spirit of God withdrawn, (which never stays with a man, when conscience has once left him) the soul, like the *first matter to all forms*, has an universal propensity to all lewdness. For every violation of conscience

science proportionably wears off something of its native tenderness, which tenderness being the cause of that anguish and remorse that it feels, upon the commission of sin; it follows, that when, by degrees, it comes to have worn off all this tenderness, the sinner will find no trouble of mind upon his doing the very wickedest, and worst of actions; and consequently, that this is the most direct and effectual introduction to all sorts and degrees of sin.

For which reason it was, that I alledged *sinning against conscience*, for one of the causes of this vile temper, and habit of mind, which we are now discoursing of: Not that it has any special productive efficiency of this particular sort of sinning, more than of any other, but that it is a general cause of this, as of all other great vices; and that it is impossible, but a man must have first passed this notable stage, and got his conscience thoroughly debauched and hardened, before he can arrive to the height of sin; which I account the delighting in other mens sins to be.

3. A third cause of this villainous disposition of mind, *besides* a man's personal commission of such and such sins, and his commission of them against conscience, must be also his continuance in them. For, God forbid, that every single commission of a sin, tho'

great for its kind, and withal, acted against conscience, for its aggravation, should so far deprave the soul, and bring it to such a *reprobate sense* and condition, as to *take pleasure in other mens sins*. For, we know, what a foul sin *David* committed, and what a crime *St. Peter* himself fell into; both of them, no doubt, fully and clearly against the dictates of their conscience; yet we do not find, that either of them was thereby brought to such an impious frame of heart, as to delight in their own sins, and much less in other mens. And therefore, it is not every sinful violation of conscience that can *quench the spirit*, to such a degree, as we have been speaking of; but it must be a long, inveterate course and custom of sinning after this manner, that, at length, produces and ends in such a cursed effect. For, this is so great a master-piece in sin, that no man begins with it: He must have passed his *Tyrocinium*, or *Novitiate*, in sinning, before he can come to this, be he never so quick a proficient. No man can mount so fast, as to set his foot upon the highest step of the ladder at first. Before a man can come to be pleased with sin, because he sees his neighbour commit it, he must have had such a long acquaintance with it himself, as to create a kind of intimacy, or friendship, between him and that;

that ; and then, we know, a man is naturally glad to see his old friend, not only at his own house, but wheresoever he meets him. It is generally the property of an old sinner, to find a delight in reviewing his own villainies in the practice of other men ; to see his sin, and himself (as it were) in reversion ; and to find a greater satisfaction in beholding him, who succeeds him in his vice, than him who is to succeed him in his estate. In the matter of sin, age makes a greater change upon the soul, than it does, or can, upon the body. And as in this, if we compare the picture of a man, drawn at the years of seventeen or eighteen, with a picture of the same person at three-score and ten, hardly the least trace or similitude of one face can be found in the other : So for the soul, the difference of the dispositions, and qualities of the inner man, will be found much greater. Compare the harmlessness, the credulity, the tenderness, the modesty, and the ingenuous pliability to virtuous counsels, which is in youth, as it comes fresh and untainted out of the hands of nature, with the mischievousness, the slyness, the craft, the impudence, the falsehood, and the confirmed obstinacy in most sorts of sin, that is to be found in an aged, long-practised sinner, and you will confess the complexion and hue of his soul, to be alter'd

more than that of his face. Age has given him another body, and custom another mind. All those seeds of virtue, and good morality, that were the natural endowments of our first years, are lost, and dead for ever. And in respect of the native innocence of childhood, no man, through *old age*, becomes *twice a child*. The vices of old age have in them the stiffness of it too. And as it is the unfittest time to *learn in*, so the unfitness of it to *unlearn*, will be found much greater.

Which considerations, joined with that of its imbecillity, make it the proper season for a superannuated sinner to enjoy the delights of sin in the rebound; and to supply the impotence of practice by the airy, phantastick pleasure of memory and reflexion. For all that can be allowed him now, is to refresh his decrepit, effete sensuality, with the transcript and history of his former life, recognized, and read over by him, in the vitious rants of the vigorous, youthful debauchees of the present time, whom (with an odd kind of passion, mixed with pleasure, and envy too) he sees flourishing in all the bravery and prime of their age and vice. An old wrestler loves to look on, and to be near the lists, tho' *feebleness* will not let him offer at the prize. An old huntsman finds a musick in the noise of hounds, though

though he cannot follow the chace. An old drunkard loves a tavern, though he cannot go to it, but as he is supported, and led by another, just as some are observed to come from thence. And an old wanton will be doating upon women, when he can scarce see them without spectacles. And to shew the true love and faithful allegiance that the old servants and subjects of vice ever after bear to it, nothing is more usual and frequent, than to hear, that such as have been strumpets in their youth, turn procurers in their age. Their great concern is, that the vice may still go on.

4. A fourth cause of mens taking pleasure in the sins of others, is, from that meanness and poor-spiritedness, that naturally and inseparably accompanies all guilt. Whosoever is conscious to himself of sin, feels in himself (whether he will own it or no) a proportionable shame, and a secret depression of spirit thereupon. And this is so irksome and uneasy to man's mind, that he is restless to relieve, and rid himself from it: For which he finds no way so effectual, as to get company in the same sin. For company in any action, gives both credit to that, and countenance to the agent; and so much as the sinner gets of

this, so much he casts off of shame. Singularity in sin puts it out of fashion; since to be alone in any practice, seems to make the judgment of the world against it; but the concurrence of others is a tacit approbation of that, in which they concur. Solitude is a kind of nakedness, and the result of that, we know, is shame. 'Tis company only that can bear a man out in an ill thing; and he who is to encounter and fight the law, will be sure to need a *second*. No wonder therefore, if some take delight in the immoralities and baseness of others; for nothing can support their minds drooping, and sneaking, and inwardly reproaching them, from a sense of their own guilt, but to see others as bad as themselves.

To be vicious amongst the virtuous, is a double disgrace and misery; but where the whole company is vicious and debauched, they presently like, or at least easily pardon one another. And, as it is observed by some, that there is none so homely, but loves a looking-glass; so it is certain, that there is no man so vicious, but delights to see the image of his vice reflected upon him, from one who exceeds, or at least equals him in the same.

Sin in itself is not only shameful, but also weak; and it seeks a remedy for both in society :

ciety: for it is this, that must give it both colour and support. But, on the contrary, how great, and (as I may so speak) how self-sufficient a thing is virtue! It needs no credit from abroad, no countenance from the multitude. Were there but one virtuous man in the world, he would hold up his head with confidence, and honour. He would shame the world, and not the world him. For, according to that excellent and great saying, *Prov. xiv. 14. A good man shall be satisfied from himself.* He needs look no further. But if he desires to see the same virtue propagated, and diffused to those about him; it is for their sakes, not his own. It is his charity that wishes, and not his necessity that requires it. For solitude and singularity can neither daunt, nor disgrace him; unless we could suppose it a disgrace for a man to be singularly good.

But a vicious person, like the basest sort of beasts, never enjoys himself, but in the herd. Company, he thinks, lessens the shame of vice, by sharing it; and abates the torrent of a common odium, by deriving it into many channels; and therefore, if he cannot wholly avoid the eye of the observer, he hopes to distract it at least by a multiplicity of the object. These, I confess, are poor shifts, and miserable shelters, for a sick and a self-upbraiding

ing conscience to fly to ; and yet they are some of the best, that the debauchee has to cheer up his spirits with in this world. For if, after all, he must needs be seen, and took notice of, with all his filth and noisomeness about him, he promises himself however, that it will be some allay to his reproach, to be but one of many, to march in a troop, and by a preposterous kind of *ambition to be seen in bad company*.

5. The fifth and last cause (that I shall mention) inducing men to take pleasure in the sins of others, is a certain, peculiar, unaccountable malignity, that is in some natures and dispositions. I know no other name or word, to express it by. But the thing itself is frequently seen in the temporal concerns of this world. For, are there not some who find an inward secret rejoicing in themselves, when they see or hear of the loss or calamity of their neighbour, though no imaginable interest, or advantage of their own, is, or can be served thereby? But (it seems) there is a base, wolfish principle within, that is fed, and gratified with another's misery; and no other account or reason in the world can be given of its being so, but that it is the *nature of the beast* to delight in such things.

And

And as this occurs frequently in temporals, so there is no doubt, but that with some few persons, it acts the same way also in spirituals. I say, with some few persons; for, thanks be to God, the common, known corruption of human nature, upon the bare stock of its original depravation, does not usually proceed so far. Such an one, for instance, was that wretch, who made a poor captive renounce his religion, in order to the saving of his life; and when he had so done, presently run him through, glorying that he had thereby destroyed his enemy, both body and soul. But more remarkably such was that monster of diabolical baseness here in *England*, who, some years since, in the reign of king *Charles I.* suffered death for crimes scarce ever heard of before; having frequently boasted, that as several men had their several pleasures and recreations, so his peculiar pleasure and recreation was to *destroy souls*, and accordingly to put men upon such practices as he knew would assuredly do it. But above all, the late saying of some of the dissenting brotherhood ought to be proclaimed and celebrated to their eternal honour; who, while there was another new oath preparing, which they both supposed, and hoped most of the clergy would not take, in a most insulting manner gave out thereupon;
That

That they were resolved either to have our livings, or to damn our souls. An expression, so fraught with all the spight and poyson which the devil himself could infuse into words, that it ought to remain as a monument of the humanity, charity and christianity of this sort of men for ever.

Now such a temper or principle as these and the like passages do import, I call a *peculiar malignity of nature*; since it is evident, that neither the inveterate love of vice, nor yet the long practice of it, and that even against the reluctancies, and light of conscience, can of itself have this devilish effect upon the mind, but as it falls in with such a villainous, preter-natural disposition, as I have mentioned. For to instance in the particular case of parents and children, let a father be never so vicious, yet, generally speaking, he would not have his child so. Nay, it is certain, that some, who have been as corrupt in their morals, as vice could make them, have yet been infinitely solicitous, to have their children soberly, virtuously, and piously brought up: So that, although they have *begot sons after their own likenesses*, yet they are not willing to *breed* them so too.

Which, by the way, is the most pregnant demonstration in the world, of that self-condemning

demning sentence, that is perpetually sounding in every great sinner's breast; and of that inward grating dislike of the very thing he practises, that he should abhor to see the same in any one, whose good he nearly tenders, and whose person he wishes well to. But if now on the other side, we should chance to find a father corrupting his son, or a mother debauching her daughter, as (God knows such monsters have been seen within the four seas) we must not charge this barely upon an high predominance of vice in these persons, but much more upon a peculiar anomaly, and baseness of nature: If the name of *nature* may be allowed to that which seems to be an utter cashiering of it; a deviation from, and a contradiction to the common principles of humanity. For this is such a disposition, as strips the *father* of the *man*, as makes him *sacrifice his children to Moloch*; and as much out-do the cruelty of a *Cannibal*, or a *Saturn*, as it is more barbarous and inhuman to *damn* a child than to *devour* him. We sometimes read and hear of monstrous *births*, but we may often see a greater monstrosity in *educations*; thus, when a father has begot a man, he trains him up into a beast. Making even his own house a stew, a bordel, and a school of lewdness, to instill the rudiments of vice into the unwary,

unwary, flexible years of his poor children, poisoning their tender minds with the irresistible authentick venom of his base example; so that all the instruction they find within their father's walls, shall be only to be disciplined to an earlier practice of sin, to be *catechised* into all the mysteries of iniquity, and at length, *confirmed* in a mature, grown up, incorrigible state of debauchery. And this some parents call a teaching their children to *know the world*, and to *study men*: Thus leading them (as it were) by the hand, through all the forms and classes, all the varieties and modes of villainy, till at length they make them ten times more the children of the *devil*, than of *themselves*. Now, I say, if the unparalleled wickedness of the age should at any time cast us upon such blemishes of mankind as these, who, while they thus treat their children, should abuse and usurp the name of *parents*, by assuming it to themselves; let us not call them by the low, diminutive term or title of *sinful*, *wicked*, or *ungodly* men; but let us look upon them as so many prodigious exceptions from our common nature, as so many portentous animals, like the strange unnatural productions of *Africa*, and fit to be *publickly shewn*, were they not unfit to be *seen*. For certainly, where a child finds his own parents

his

his perverters, he cannot be so properly said to be *born*, as to be *damned in the world*; and better were it for him by far, to have been *unborn*, and *unbegot*, than to come to *ask blessing* of those whose conversation breathes nothing but contagion and a *curse*. So impossible, and so much a paradox is it, for any parent to impart to his child his blessing, and his vice too.

And thus I have dispatched the *first general thing* proposed for the handling of the words, and shewn in five several particulars, *What it is that brings a man to such a disposition of mind, as to take pleasure in other mens sins*. I proceed now to the

Second, Which is, *To shew the reasons, why a man's being disposed to do so, comes to be attended with such an extraordinary guilt*. And the first shall be taken from this, That naturally there is no motive to induce or tempt a man to this way of sinning. And this is a most certain truth, That the lesser the temptation is, the greater is the sin. For, in every sin, by how much the more free the will is in its choice, by so much is the act the more sinful. *And* where there is nothing to importune, urge, or provoke it to act, there is so much an higher, and perfecter degree of freedom, about that act. For albeit, the will is

not

not capable of being compelled to any of its actings, yet it is capable of being made to act with more or less difficulty, according to the different impressions it receives from motives, or objects. If the object be extremely pleasing, and apt to gratify it; there, though the will has still a power of refusing it, yet it is not without some difficulty. Upon which account it is, that men are so strongly carried out to, and so hardly took off from the practice of vice; namely, because the sensual pleasure arising *from it*, is still importuning and drawing them *to it*.

But now, from whence springs this pleasure? Is it not from the gratification of some desire founded in nature? An irregular gratification it is indeed very often; yet still the foundation of it is, and must be, something natural: So that the sum of all is this, That the naturalness of a desire, is the cause that the satisfaction of it is pleasure, and pleasure importunes the will, and that which importunes the will, puts a difficulty in the will's refusing or forbearing it. Thus drunkenness is an irregular satisfaction of the appetite of thirst; uncleanness an unlawful gratification of the appetite of procreation; and covetousness a boundless, unreasonable pursuit of the principle of self-preservation. So that all these
are

are founded in some natural desire, and are therefore pleasurable, and upon that account tempt, sollicit, and intice the will. In a word, there is hardly any one vice or sin of direct and personal commission, but what is the irregularity and abuse of one of those two grand natural principles; namely, either that which inclines a man to *preserve himself*, or that which inclines him to *please himself*.

But now, what principle, faculty or desire, by which nature projects either its own *pleasure* or *preservation*, is, or can be gratified by another man's personal pursuit of his own vice? It is evident, that all the pleasure, that *naturally* can be received from a vicious action, can immediately and personally affect none but him who does it; for it is an application of the pleasing object only to his own sense: and no man feels by another man's senses. And therefore the delight that a man takes from another's sin, can be nothing else but a phantastical, preter-natural complacency arising from that, which he has really no sense or feeling of. It is properly a love of vice, as such, a delighting in sin for its own sake; and is a direct imitation, or rather an exemplification of the malice of the devil, who delights in seeing those sins committed, which the very condition of his nature renders him incapable of

committing himself. For the devil can neither drink, nor whore, nor play the epicure, though he enjoys the pleasures of all these at a second hand, and by malicious approbation. *If a man plays the thief, (says Solomon) and steals to satisfy his hunger,* Prov. vi. 30. though it cannot wholly excuse the fact, yet it sometimes extenuates the guilt. And, we know, there are some corrupt affections in the soul of man, that urge and push him on, to their satisfaction, with such an impetuous fury, that when we see a man over-born and run down by them, considering the frailty of human nature, we cannot but pity the person, while we abhor the crime. It being like one ready to drink poison, rather than to die with thirst.

But when a man shall, with a sober, sedate, diabolical rancour, look upon and enjoy himself in the sight of his neighbour's sin and shame, and secretly hug himself upon the ruins of his brother's virtue, and the dishonours of his reason, can he plead the instigation of any appetite in nature inclining him to this? And that would otherwise render him uneasy to himself, should he not thus triumph in another's folly and confusion? No, certainly this cannot be so much as pretended. For he may as well carry his eyes in another man's head, and run races with another man's feet, as directly and
natu-

naturally taste the pleasures that spring from the gratification of another man's appetites.

Nor can that person, whosoever he is, who accounts it his recreation and diversion, to see *one man* wallowing in his filthy revels, and another made infamous and noisome by his sensuality, be so impudent, as to alledge for a reason of his so doing, that either all the enormous draughts of the one, do or can leave the least relish upon the tip of his tongue; or, that all the fornications and whoredoms of the other, do or can quench, or cool the boilings of his own lust. No, this is impossible. And if so, what can we then assign for the cause of this monstrous disposition? Why, all that can be said in this case, is, that nature proceeds by quite another method; having given men such and such appetites, and allotted to each of them their respective pleasures; the *appetite*, and the *pleasure*, still cohabiting in the same subject: But the devil and long custom of sinning have super-induced upon the soul, new, unnatural, and absurd desires; desires, that have no real object; desires, that relish things not at all desirable; but, like the sickness and distemper of the soul, feeding only upon filth and corruption, fire and brimstone, and giving a man the devil's nature, and the devil's delight; who has no other joy or hap-

196 *Of taking pleasure in* Sermon 5.

pineness, but to dishonour his Maker, and to destroy his fellow-creature ; to corrupt him here, and to torment him hereafter. In fine, there is as much difference between the pleasure a man takes in his own sins, and that which he takes in other mens, as there is between the wickedness of a man, and the wickedness of a devil.

2. A second reason why a man's taking pleasure in the sins of others, comes to be attended with such an extraordinary guilt, is from the boundless, unlimited nature of this way of sinning. For by this a man contracts a kind of an universal guilt, and (as it were) sins over the sins of all other men ; so that while the *act* is theirs, the guilt of it is equally his. Consider any man as to his personal powers, and opportunities of sinning, and comparatively, they are not great ; for at greatest, they must still be limited by the measure of a man's acting, and the term of his duration. And a man's active powers are but weak, and his continuance in the world but short. So that nature is not sufficient to keep pace with his corruptions, by answering desire with proportionable practice.

For to instance in those two grand extravagancies of lust and drunkenness : Surely no man is of so general and diffusive a lust, as to pro-

prosecute his amours all the world over; and let it burn never so outrageously for the present, yet age will in time chill those heats; and the impure flame will either die of itself, or consume the body that harbours it. And so for intemperance in drinking; no man can be so much a swine, as to be always pouring in, but in the compass of some years, he will drown his health and his strength in his own belly; and after all his drunken trophies, at length *drink down* himself too; and that certainly will and must put an end to the debauch.

But now, for the way of sinning which we have been speaking of, it is neither confined by place, nor weakened by age, but the bed-ridden, the gouty, and the lethargick, may, upon this account, equal the activity of the strongest and the most vegete sinner. Such an one may take his brother by the throat, and act the murderer, even while he can neither stir an hand or foot; and he may invade his neighbour's bed, while weakness has tied him down to his own. He may sin over all the adulteries and debauches, all the frauds and oppressions of the whole neighbourhood, and (as I may so speak) he may break every command of God's law by proxy, and it were well for him, if he could be damned by proxy too. A

198 *Of taking pleasure in* Serm. 5.

man, by delight and fancy, may grasp in the fins of countries and ages, and by an inward liking of them, communicate in their guilt. He may take a range all the world over, and draw in all that wide circumference of sin and vice, and centre it in his own breast. For, whatsoever sin a man extremely loves, and would commit, if he had opportunity, and in the mean time, pleases himself with the speculation of the same, whether ever he commits it or no, it leaves a stain and a guilt upon his conscience; and, according to the spiritual and severe accounts of the law, is made in a great respect his own. So that by this means, there is a kind of transmigration of sins, much like that which *Pythagoras* held of souls. Such an one, to be sure, it is, as makes a man not only (according to the Apostle's phrase) a *partaker of other mens sins*, but also a deriver of the whole intire guilt of them to himself; and yet so, as to leave the committer of them as full of guilt, as he was before.

From whence we see the infinitely fruitful and productive power of this way of sinning; how it can increase and multiply beyond all bounds and measures of actual commission, and how vastly it swells the sinner's account in an instant. So that a man shall, out of the various and even numberless kinds of villainy,
acted

acted by all the people and nations round about him (as it were) extract one mighty, comprehensive guilt, and adopt it to himself, and so become chargeable with, and accountable for, *a world of sin* without a figure.

3. The third and last reason that I shall assign, of the extraordinary guilt, attending a man's being disposed to take pleasure in other mens sins, shall be taken from the soul's preparation and passage to such a disposition; for that it presupposes and includes in it the guilt of many preceding sins. For (as it has been shewn) a man must have passed many periods of sin before he can arrive to it; and have served a long apprenticeship to the devil, before he can come to such a perfection and maturity in vice, as this imports. It is a collection of the guilt of a long and numerous train of villainies, the compendium and sum-total of several particular impieties, all united and *cast up* into one. It is (as it were) the very quintessence and sublimation of vice, by which (as in the spirit of liquors) the malignity of many actions is contracted into a little compass, but with a greater advantage of strength and force, by such a contraction.

In a word, it is the wickedness of a whole life, discharging all its filth and foulness into this one quality, as into a great sink or com-

200 *Of taking pleasure, &c.* Serm. 5.

mon shore. So that nothing is, or can be, so properly and significantly called the *very sinfulness of sin*, as this. And therefore no wonder, if containing so many years guilt in the bowels of it, it stands here stigmatized by the apostle, as a temper of mind, rendring men so detestably bad, that the great enemy of mankind, the devil himself, neither can, nor desires to make them worse. I cannot, I need not say any more of it. It is indeed a condition not to be thought of (by persons serious enough to think and consider) without the utmost horror. But such as truly fear God, shall both be kept from it, and from those sins that lead to it.

To which God, infinitely wise, holy, and just, be render'd and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

Of

*Of the heinous Sin of taking pleasure in
other Mens Sins.*

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd on the

Preceding SUBJECT.

THE
SIN OF TAKING PLEASURE IN
OTHER MEN'S SINS

A
SERMON
PREACHED ON THE

PROCEEDING SUBJECT

THE
SIN OF TAKING PLEASURE IN
OTHER MEN'S SINS

Sermon

==

S

P

When

t

v

f

a

T

into

Th

ing,

(who

is gr

comm

SERMON VI.

Upon the
 Preceding SUBJECT.

ROMANS i. 32.

Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

THE sense of these words I shewed, in the preceding discourse, fell naturally into this one proposition : *Viz.*

That the guilt arising from a man's delighting, or taking pleasure in other mens sins, or, (which is all one) in other men for their sins, is greater than he can possibly contract by a commission of the same sins in his own person.

The

204 *Of taking pleasure in* Sermon. 6.

The prosecution of which I stated upon these three things.

First, To shew what it is that brings a man to such a disposition of mind, as to take pleasure in other mens sins.

Secondly, To shew the reasons why a man's being disposed to do so, comes to be attended with such an extraordinary guilt.

Thirdly, and *lastly*, To declare what kind of persons are to be reckoned under this character.

The two first of which being dispatched already, I proceed now to the *third* and *last*: Concerning which, I shall lay down this general assertion; *That whosoever draws others to sin, ought to be lookt upon, as one delighting in those sins, that he draws them to.* Forasmuch as no man is brought to do any thing, especially if it be ill or wicked, but in order to the pleasing of himself by it: It being absurd and incredible, that any one should venture to damn himself hereafter, for that which does not some way or other gratify and please him here. But to draw forth this general into particulars.

1. First of all: *Those are to be accounted to take pleasure in other mens sins, who teach doctrines, directly tending to engage such as believe them, in a sinful course.* For there is

none

none so compendious and efficacious a way to prepare a man for all sin, as this: this being properly to put out the eyes of that which is to be his guide, by perverting his judgment; and when that is once done, you may carry him whither you will. Chance must be his rule, and present appetite his director. A man's judgment or conscience, is the great spring of all his actions; and consequently, to corrupt or pervert this, is to derive a contagion upon all that he does. And therefore we see how high a guilt our Saviour charges upon this; in *Matth. v. 19. Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven*: That is, in truth shall never come thither. And we find, the great sin of the *Pharisees* was, that they promoted and abetted the sins of other men, taught the devil's doctrine out of *Moses's* chair, and by false descants upon the divine precepts, cut asunder the binding force of them. So that, according to their wretched comments, men might break the law, and yet never sin against it. For, in *Matth. xv. 5, 6.* they had taught men how to dishonour their parents, without any violation of the fifth commandment. Thus they preached: And what design can any one imagine the Authors of such doctrines could have,
but

but the depravation of mens manners ! For, if some men teach wicked things, it must be, that others should practise them. And, if one man sets another a copy, it is, no doubt, with a purpose that he should write after it.

Now these doctrines are of two sorts.

1. Such as represent actions, that are in themselves really wicked and sinful, as not so.
2. Such as represent them much less sinful as to their kind or degrees, than indeed they are.

For the first of which ; to instance in one very gross one, instead of many, take the doctrine of those, commonly called *Antinomians*, who assert positively, that *believers* or *persons regenerate, and within the covenant of grace, cannot sin*. Upon which account, no wonder if some very liberally assume to themselves the condition and character of believers: for then they know, that other mighty privilege belongs to them of course. But what? May not these *believers* cheat and lye, commit adultery, steal, murder, and rebel? Why, yes, they may ; and nothing is more common, than to see such *believers* do such things. But how then, can they escape the charge of all that guilt, that naturally follows from such enormities? Why, thus, you must in this case with great care and accuracy distinguish between the

the *act* of lying, and the *sin* of lying; the *act* of stealing, and the *sin* of stealing; and the *act* of rebellion, and the *sin* of rebellion. Now, though all these *acts* are frequent and usual with such persons, yet they are sure (as they order the matter) never to be guilty of the *sin*. And the reason is, because it is not the *quality* of the action that derives a qualification upon the person, so as to render him such or such, good or bad; but it is the antecedent quality or condition of the person that denominates his actions, and stamps them good or evil. So that they are those only who are first wicked, that do wicked actions. But believers, and the *godly*, though they do the very same things, yet they so much out-wit the devil, in the doing of them, that they never commit the same sins. But, you will say, how came they by such a great and strange privilege? Why; they will tell you, it is *because they are not under the obliging power of the law*. And if you ask further; how they come to get from under that common obligation that lies so hard and heavy upon all the rest of the world? They will tell you, it is from this, that *believers instead of the law have the Spirit actually dwelling in them*, and by an admirable kind of invisible *clock-work* moving them, just as a spring does a watch; and that
imme-

immediately by himself alone, without the mediation of any *written law or rule*, to guide or direct, and much less to command or oblige them. So that the *Spirit*, we see, is to be their sole director without, and very often contrary to the *written law*. An excellent contrivance, doubtless, to authorize and sanctify the blackest, and most flagitious actions, that can proceed from man. For, since the motions of the Spirit (which they so confidently suppose themselves to have) cannot so much as in things good and lawful, by any certain diagnostick, be distinguished from the motions of a man's own heart, they very easily make a step farther, and even in things unlawful, conclude the motions of their own hearts to be the impulse of the Spirit; and this presently alters the whole complexion of an action, that would otherwise look but very scurvily; and makes it absolutely pure, and unblameable, or rather perfect and meritorious. So that let a man have but impudence, and wickedness enough to libel his Maker, and to entitle the *Spirit of God* to all that he does or desires, furnaming his own inclinations and appetites (though never so irregular and impure) the *Holy Ghost*; and you may, upon very sure grounds, turn him loose, and bid him *sin* if he can. And thus much for the first sort of doctrines.

doctrines, which once believed, like the flood-gates of hell pulled up, lets in a deluge and inundation of all sin and vice upon the lives of men. And if this be the natural *effect* of the doctrines themselves, we cannot, in all reason, but infer, that the interest of the teachers of them must needs be agreeable.

2. The other sort of doctrines tending to engage such as believe them in a sinful course, are such as represent many sins *much less* as to their *kind* or *degree*, than indeed they are. Of which number is that doctrine, that asserts all sins committed by believers, or persons in a state of grace, to be but infirmities. That there are such things as sins of *infirmity*, in contradistinction to those of *presumption*, is a truth not to be questioned; but *in hypothesis*, to state exactly which are sins of *infirmity*, and which are not, is not so easy a work. This is certain, that there is a vast difference between them; indeed, as vast as between *inadvertency* and *deliberation*, between *surprize* and *set-purpose*: And that persons truly regenerate have sinned this latter way, and consequently may sin so again, is as evident as the story (already referred to by us) of *David's* murder and adultery, sins acted not only with deliberation, but with artifice, study, and deep contrivance. And can sins, that carry such dismal marks, and black symptoms upon

them, pass for *infirmities*? For sins of daily incurfion, and fuch as human frailty, and the very condition of our nature in this world is fo unavoidably liable to, (for fo are fins of infirmity) that a *righteous man may fall into them seven times in a day*; and yet, according to the merciful tenor of the covenant of grace, stand accepted before God as a righteous man ftill? No, certainly, if fuch are *infirmities*, it will be hard to affign what are *presumptions*. And what a fin-encouraging doctrine that is, that avouches them for fuch, is fufficiently manifeft from hence, that, *although every fin of infirmity*, in its own nature, and according to the ftrict rigor of the law, merits eternal death; yet it is certain from the gofpel, that no man fhall actually fuffer eternal death barely for fins of *infirmity*. Which being fo, perfuade but a man that a regenerate perfon may cheat and lye, ftcal, murder, and rebel, by way of *infirmity*, and at the fame time you perfuade him alfo, that he may do all this without any danger of damnation. And then, fince thefe are oftentimes fuch defireable privileges to *flesh and blood*; and fince withal, every man by nature is fo very prone to think the beft of himfelf, and of his own condition; it is odds, but he will find a fhrewd temptation to believe himfelf *regenerate*, rather than forbear

bear a pleasurable, or a profitable sin, by thinking that he shall go to hell for committing it. Now this being such a direct manuduction to all kind of sin, by abusing the conscience with undervaluing persuasions, concerning the malignity and guilt even of the foulest; it is evident, that such as teach and promote the belief of such doctrines, are to be look'd upon as the devil's prophets and apostles; and there is no doubt, but the guilt of every sin, that either from pulpit, or from press, they influence men to the commission of, does as certainly rest upon them, and will one day be as severely exacted of them, as if they had actually and personally committed it themselves.

And thus I have instanced in two notable doctrines, that may justly be look'd upon as the general inlets, or two great gates, through which all vice and villainy rush in upon the manners of men professing religion. But the *particulars*, into which these *generals* diffuse themselves, you may look for, and find in those well-furnished magazines and store-houses of all immorality and baseness, the books and writings of some modern casuists; who, like the devil's *amanuenses*, and secretaries to the prince of darkness, have published to the world such notions and intrigues of sin out of his cabinet, as neither the wit or

wickedness of man, upon the bare natural stock, either of invention or corruption, could ever have found out.

The writings, both of the Old and New Testament, make it very difficult for a man to be *saved*; but the writings of these men make it more difficult, if not impossible, for any one to be *damned*: For where there is no sin, there can be no damnation. And, as these men have obscured and confounded the natures and properties of things by their false principles, and wretched sophistry, though an act be never so sinful, they will be sure to strip it of its guilt; and to make the very *law* and *rule* of action so *pliable* and *bending*, that it shall be impossible to be *broke*. So that he, who goes to hell, must pass through a *narrower gate* than that, which the Gospel says, leads to *heaven*. For that, we are told, is only *strait*, but this is absolutely *shut*; and so *shut*, that *sin* cannot pass it, and therefore it is much if a *sinner* should.

So insufferably have these impostors poisoned the fountains of morality, perverted and embased the very standard and distinguishing rule of good and evil. So that all their books and writings are but debauchery upon record, and impiety registred and consigned over to posterity.

In

In every volume there is a nursery and plantation of vice, where it is sure to thrive, and from thence to be transplanted into mens practice. For, here it is manured with art and argument, sheltered with fallacy and distinction, and thereby enabled both to annoy others, and to defend itself.

And to shew how far the malignity of this way of sinning reaches; he, who has vented a pernicious doctrine, or published an ill book, must know, that his guilt and his life, determine not together: No, such an one (as the apostle says) *being dead, yet speaketh*; he sins in his very grave, corrupts others while he is rotting himself, and has a growing account in the other world, after he has paid nature's last debt in this: And in a word, quits this life like a man carried off by the plague; who, though he dies himself, yet does execution upon others by a surviving infection.

2. Such also are to be *reckoned to take pleasure in other mens sins, as endeavour, by all means, to allure men to sin*, and that either by formal persuasion, importunity, or desire, as we find the harlot described, enticing the young man, in *Prov. vii.* from ver. 13. to 22. Or else by administering objects and occasions fit to inflame or draw forth a man's corrupt affections; such as are the drinking of a cholerick

214 *Of taking pleasure in* Serm.6.

or revengeful person into a fit of rage and violence against the person of his neighbour; thus heating one man's blood in order to the shedding of another's. Such also is the provoking of a lustful, incontinent person, by filthy discourse, wanton books, and pictures; and that which equals, and exceeds them all, the incentives of the *stage*; till a man's vice and folly works over all bounds, and grows at length too mad and outrageous, to be either governed or concealed.

Now, with great variety of such kind of traders for hell, as these, has the nation of late years abounded. Wretches who live upon the shark, and other mens fins, the common poisoners of youth, equally desperate in their fortunes, and their manners, and getting their very bread by the damnation of souls. So that if any unexperienced young novice happens into the fatal neighbourhood of such pests, presently they are upon him, plying his full purse, and his empty pate, with addressees suitable to his vanity; telling him, what pity it is, that one so accomplished for parts and person, should smother himself in the country, where he can learn nothing of gallantry, or behaviour; as how to make his court, to hector a drawer, to cog the dye, or storm a whore-house; but must of necessity live and die ignorant of what
it

it is to trapan, or be trapann'd, to sup, or rather dine, at midnight in a tavern, with the noise of oaths, blasphemies, and fidlers about his ears, and to fight every watch and constable at his return from thence, and to be beaten by them: But must at length, poor man! die dully of old age at home; when here he might so fashionably and genteelly, long before that time, have been duelled or fluxed into another world.

If this be not the guise and practice of the times, especially as to the principal cities of the kingdom, let any one judge; and whether for such a poor, deluded wretch, instead of growing rusty in the country, (as some call it) to be thus brought by a company of indigent, debauched, soul-and-body-destroying harpyes, to lose his estate, family, and virtue, amongst them in the city, be not a much greater violation of the publick weal and justice of any government, than most of those crimes, that bring the committers of them to the gallows, we may at present easily see, and one day perhaps sadly feel.

Nor is this trade of corrupting the gentry, and nobility, and seasoning them with the vices of the great town, as soon as they set foot into it, carried on secretly, and in a corner, but openly, and in the face of the sun; by per-

sons who have formed themselves into companies, or rather corporations. So that a man may as easily know where to find one to teach him to debauch, whore, game, and blaspheme, as to teach him to write, or cast accompts: 'Tis their support and business; nay, their very profession and livelihood; getting their living by those practices, for which they deserve to forfeit their lives.

Now these are another sort of men, who are justly charged with the guilt and character of delighting in other mens sins: Men, who are the devil's setters; who contrive, study, and beat their brains, how to draw in some poor, innocent, unguarded heir into their hellish net, learning his humour, prying into his circumstances, and observing his weak side; and all this to plant the snare, and apply the temptation effectually and successfully; and when by such insinuations they have once got within him, and are able to drill him on from one lewdness to another, by the same arts corrupting and squeezing him as they please; no wonder, if they rejoice to see him guilty of all sorts of villainy, and take *pleasure* in those sins, in which they find their *profit* too.

3. Such as affect the company of infamous, and vicious persons, are also to be reckoned in the number of those who take pleasure in such
mens

mens vices. For otherwise, what is there in such men, which they can pretend to be pleased with! For generally such fots have neither parts nor wit, ingenuity of discourse, nor fineness of conversation, to entertain or delight any one, that, coming into their company, brings but his reason along with him. But, on the contrary, their rude, impertinent loudness, their quarrels, their nastiness, their dull, obscene talk, and ribaldry, (which from them you must take for *wit*, or go without it) cannot but be nauseous and offensive to any one, who does not baulk his own reason, out of love to their vice; and, for the sake of the sin itself, pardon the ugliness of its circumstances. As a father will hug and embrace his beloved son for all the dirt and foulness of his cloaths; the dearness of the person easily apologizing for the disagreeableness of the habit.

One would think it should be no easy matter to bring any man of sense to love an *ale-house*; indeed of so much sense, as *seeing* and *smelling* amounts to, there being such strong encounters of both, as would quickly send him packing, did not the love of good-fellowship reconcile him to those nuisances, and the deity he adored compound for the homeliness of its shrine.

It

It is clear therefore, that where a man can like and love the conversation of lewd, debauch'd persons, amidst all the natural grounds and motives of loathing and dislike, it can proceed from nothing but the inward affection he bears to their lewd, debauched humour. It is this that he *enjoys*; and, for the sake of this, the rest he *endures*.

4. And *lastly*, Such as encourage, countenance, and support men in their sins, are to be reckoned in the number of those, who take pleasure in other mens sins. Now this may be done two ways:

First, By *commendation*. Concerning which we may take this for granted; that no man commends another any farther than he likes him: For indeed to commend any one, is to vouch him to the world, to undertake for his worth, and, in a word, to own the thing which he is chiefly remarkable for. He who writes an *Encomium Neronis*, if he does it heartily, is himself but a transcript of *Nero* in his mind; and would (no doubt) gladly enough see such pranks, as he was famous for, acted again, though he dares not be the actor of them himself.

From whence we see the reason of some mens giving such honourable names and appellations to the worst of men and actions, and
base,

base, reproachful titles to the best : such as are calling *faction*, and a spitting in their prince's face, *petitioning* ; fanaticism and schism, *true protestantism* ; sacrilege and rapine, *thorough reformation*, and the like. As on the contrary, branding conformity to the rules and rites of the best church in the world, with the false and odious name of *formality* ; and traducing all religious, consciencious observers of them, as *mungrel protestants*, and *papists in masquerade*. And indeed, many are, and have been called *papists* of late years, whom those very persons, who call them so, know to be far from being so. But what then do they mean, by fixing such false characters upon men, even against their own consciences ? Why, they mean and design this : They would set such a mark upon those whom they hate, as may cause their throats to be cut, and their estates to be seized upon, when the rabble shall be let loose upon the government once again ; which such beggarly, malicious fellows impatiently hope and long for.

Though, I doubt not, (how much soever knaves may abuse fools with words for a time) but there will come a day, in which the most active *papists* will be found under the *puritan* mask ; in which it will appear, that the conventicle

venticle has been the jesuits safest kennel, and the papists themselves, as well as the fanatics, have been managers of all those monstrous outcries against popery, to the ruin of those protestants whom they most hate, and whom alone they fear. It being no unheard-of trick for a thief, when he is closely pursued, to cry out, *Stop the thief*, and thereby diverting the suspicion from himself, to get clear away. It is also worth our while to consider with what terms of respect and commendation knaves and fots will speak of their own fraternity. As, *What an honest, what a worthy man is such an one!* And, *What a good-natur'd person is another!* According to which terms, such as are factious, by *worthy men*, mean only such as are of the same faction, and united in the same designs against the government with themselves. And such as are brothers of the pot, by a *good-natur'd person*, mean only a true, trusty debauchee, who never stands out at a merry-meeting, so long as he is able to stand at all; nor ever refuses an health, while he has enough of his own to pledge it with; and, in a word, is as *honest*, as drunkenness and debauchery, want of *sense* and *reason*, *virtue* and *sobriety* can possibly make him.

2. The other way by which some men encourage others in their sins is by *preferment*. As, when men shall be advanced to places of trust and honour for those qualities, that render them unworthy of so much as sober and civil company. When a Lord or master shall cast his favours and rewards upon such beasts and blemishes of society, as live only to the dishonour of Him who made them, and the reproach of him who maintains them. None certainly can love to see vice in power, but such as love to see it also in practice. Place and honour do of all things most misbecome it; and a goat or a swine, in a chair of state, cannot be more odious, than ridiculous.

It is reported of *Cæsar*, that passing through a certain town, and seeing all the women of it standing at their doors with monkeys in their arms, he asked, whether the women of that country used to have any children or no? Thereby wittily and sarcastically reproaching them, for misplacing that affection upon brutes, which could only become a mother to her child. So, when we come into a great family, or government, and see this place of honour allotted to a murderer, another filled with an atheist, or blasphemer, and a third with a filthy parasite, may we not as appositely, and properly ask the question, whether there be any such thing

thing as virtue, sobriety, or religion amongst such a people, with whom vice wears those rewards, honours and privileges, which in other nations, the common judgment of reason awards only to the virtuous, the sober, and religious? And certainly it is too flagrant a demonstration, how much vice is the darling of any people, when many amongst them are preferred for those practices, for which, in other places, they can scarce be pardoned.

And thus I have finished the *third* and *last* general thing proposed, for the handling of the words, which was, *to shew the several sorts or kinds of men, which fall under the charge and character of taking pleasure in other mens sins.*

Now the inferences from the foregoing particulars shall be twofold.

1. Such as concern particular persons; And,
2. Such as concern communities or bodies of men.

And first for the malignity of such a disposition of mind, as induces a man to delight in other mens sins, with reference to the effects of it upon particular persons. As,

1. It quite alters, and depraves the natural frame of a man's heart. For there is that naturally in the heart of man, which abhors sin, as sin; and consequently would make him detest it both in himself, and in others too.

The

The first, and most genuine principles of reason, are certainly averse to it, and find a secret grief and remorse from every invasion that sin makes upon a man's innocence; and that must needs render the first entrance and admission of sin uneasy, because disagreeable. Yet time (we see) and custom of sinning, can bring a man to such a pass, that it shall be more difficult and grievous to him, to part with his sin, than ever it was to him to admit it. It shall get so far into, and lodge itself so deep within his heart, that it shall be his business and his recreation, his companion, and his other self; and the very dividing between his flesh and his bones, or rather, between his body and his soul, shall be less terrible and afflictive to him, than to be took off from his vice.

Nevertheless, as unnatural as this effect of sin is, there is one yet more so: For that innate principle of self-love, that very easily, and often blinds a man, as to any impartial reflexion upon himself; yet, for the most part, leaves his eyes open enough, to judge truly of the same thing in his neighbour, and to hate that in others, which he allows and cherishes in himself. And therefore, when it shall come to this, that he also approves, embraces and delights in sin, as he observes it, even in the person and practice of other men; this shows,
that

that the man is wholly transformed from the creature, that God first made him; nay, that he has consumed those poor remainders of good that the sin of *Adam* left him; that he has worn off the very remote dispositions, and possibilities to virtue; and, in a word, turned grace first, and afterward nature itself, out of doors. No man knows at his first entrance upon any sin, how far it may carry him, and where it will stop; the commission of sin being generally like the *pouring out of water*, which, when once poured out, knows no other bounds, but to run as far as it can.

2. A second effect of this disposition of mind, is, that it peculiarly indisposes a man to repent and recover himself from it. For the first step to repentance is a man's dislike of his sin: And how can we expect that a man should conceive any thorough dislike of *that*, which has took such an absolute possession of his heart and affections, that he likes and loves it, not only in his own practice, but also in other mens? Nay, that he is pleased with it, though he is past the practice of it. Such a temper of mind is a downright contradiction to repentance; as being founded in the destruction of those qualities, which are the only dispositions and preparatives to it. For that natural tenderness of conscience, which must first create
in

in the soul a sense of sin, and from thence produce a sorrow for it, and at length cause a relinquishment of it; that, I say, (we have already shewn) is took away by a customary repeated course of sinning against conscience. So that the very first foundation of virtue, which is the natural power of distinguishing between the moral *good* and *evil* of any action, is, in effect, pluck'd up and destroy'd, and the Spirit of God finds nothing in the heart of such an one, to apply the means of grace to; all taste, relish, and discernment of the suitableness of virtue, and the unsuitableness of vice, being utterly gone from it.

And, as this is a direct bar to that part of repentance, which looks back with sorrow and indignation upon what is past; so is it equally such, to that greater part of repentance, which is to look forward, and to prevent sin for the future. For this properly delivers a man up to sin; forasmuch as it leaves his heart destitute of all those principles, which should resist it. So that such an one must be as bad as the devil will have him, and can be no better than the devil will let him. In both he must submit to his measures. And what is this but a kind of entrance into, or rather an anticipation of hell? What is it but judgment and damnation already begun? For a man, in such a case, is as sure of it, as if he were actually in the flames.

226 *Of taking pleasure in* Sermon.6.

3. A third effect of this disposition of mind, (which also naturally follows from the former) is, that the longer man lives, the wickeder he grows, and his last days are certainly his worst. It has been observed, that to delight in other mens sins, was most properly the vice of old age; and we shall also find, that it may be as truly and properly called *the old age of vice*. For, as first, old age necessarily implies a man's having lived so many years, before it comes upon him; and withal, this sort of viciousness supposes the precedent commission of many sins, by which a man arrives to it; so it has this further property of old age: That, as when a man comes once to be old, he never retreats, but still goes on, and grows every day older and older; so, when a man comes once to such a degree of wickedness, as to delight in the wickedness of other men, it is more than ten thousand to one odds, if he ever returns to a better mind, but grows every day *worse* and *worse*. For, he has nothing else to take up his thoughts, and nothing to entertain his desires with; which, by a long estrangement from better things, come at length perfectly to loath, and fly off from them.

A notable instance of which we have in *Tiberius Cæsar*, who was bad enough in his youth, but superlatively and monstrously so in his

his old age: And the reason of this, was, because he took a particular pleasure in seeing other men do vile and odious things. So that all his diversion at his beloved *Caprea* was to be a spectator of the devil's actors, representing the worst of vices upon that infamous stage.

And therefore let not men flatter themselves, (as, no doubt, some do) that though they find it difficult at present to combat and stand out against an ill practice, and upon that account give way to a continuance in it; yet that old age shall do that for them, which they in their youth could never find in their heart to do for themselves; I say, let not such persons mock and abuse themselves with such false and absurd presumptions. For, they must know, that an habit may continue, when it is no longer able to act; or rather the elicit, internal acts of it may be quick and vigorous, when the external, imperate acts of the same habit utterly cease: And let men but reflect upon their own observation, and consider impartially with themselves, how few in the world they have known made better by age. Generally they will see, that such leave not their vice, but their vice leaves them; or rather retreats from their practices, and retires into their fancy; and that, we know, is boundless and infinite: And when

228 *Of taking pleasure in* Serm.6.

vice has once settled itself there, it finds a vaster and a wider compass to act in, than ever it had before. I scarce know any thing that calls for a more serious consideration from us, than this: For still men are apt to persuade themselves, that they shall find it an easy matter to grow virtuous as they grow old. But it is a way of arguing highly irrational and fallacious. For this is a maxim of eternal truth; *That nothing grows weak with age, but that which will at length die with age*; which sin never does. The longer a blot continues, the deeper it sinks. And it will be found a work of no small difficulty to dispossess and throw out a vice from that heart, where long possession begins to plead prescription. It is naturally impossible for an old man to grow young again; and it is next to impossible, for a decrepit, aged sinner to become a new creature, and *be born again*.

4. And *lastly*, We need no other argument of the malign effects of this disposition of mind, than this one consideration; that many perish eternally, who never arrived to such a pitch of wickedness, as to take any pleasure in, or indeed to be at all concerned about the sins of other men. But they perish in the pursuit of their own lusts, and the obedience they personally yield to their own sinful appetites: And
that

that questionless, very often not without a considerable mixture of inward dislike of themselves for what they do : Yet for all that, their sin (we see) proving too hard for them, the over-powering stream carries them away, and down they sink into the bottomless pit, though under the weight of a guilt, by vast degrees inferior to that which we have been discoursing of. For, doubtless, many men are finally lost, who yet have no mens sins to answer for, but their own : Who never enticed, nor perverted others to sin, and much less applauded, or encouraged them in their sin : but only being slaves to their own corrupt affections, have lived and died under the killing power of them ; and so passed to a sad eternity.

But that other devilish way of sinning, hitherto spoken of, is so far beyond this, that this is a kind of innocence, or rather a kind of charity, compared to it. For this is a solitary, single, that a complicated, multiplied guilt. And indeed, if we consider, at what a rate some men sin now-a-days ; that man sins charitably, who damns no-body but himself. But the other sort of sinners, who may properly enough be said to people hell, and, in a very ill sense, to *bear the sins of many* ; as they have a guilt made up of many guilts, so what can

Q 3

they

they reasonably expect, but a damnation equivalent to many damnations?

And thus much for the first general inference, from the foregoing discourse, shewing the malignity of such a disposition of mind, as induces a man to delight in other mens sins, with reference to particular persons.

2. The other inference shall be with reference to *communities*, or *bodies of men*; and so such a disposition has a most direct and efficacious influence to *propagate, multiply, and spread* the practice of any sin, till it becomes general and national. For this is most certain, that some mens taking pleasure in other mens sins, will cause many men to sin, to do them a pleasure; and this will appear upon these three accounts. 1. That it is seldom or never that any man comes to such a degree of impiety, as to take pleasure in other mens sins, but he also shews the world, by his actions and behaviour, that he does so. 2. That there are few men in the world so inconsiderable, but there are some, or other, who have an interest to serve by them. And, 3. That the natural course that one man takes to serve his interest by another, is, by applying himself to him in such a way, as may most gratify and delight him.

Now from these three things put together, it is not only easy, but necessary, to infer, that
since

since the generality of men are wholly acted by their present interest, if they find those, who can best serve them in this their interest, most likely also to be gained over so to do, by the sinful and vile practices of those who address to them; no doubt, such practices shall be pursued by such persons, in order to the compassing their desired ends. Where *greatness* takes no delight in *goodness*, we may be sure, there shall be but little goodness seen in the lives of those who have an interest to serve by such an one's greatness. For take any illustrious potent sinner, whose power is wholly employ'd to serve his pleasure, and whose chief pleasure is to see others as bad and wicked as himself; and there is no question, but in a little time, he will also make them so; and his dependants shall quickly become his proselytes. They shall sacrifice their virtue to his humour, spend their credit and good name, nay, and their very souls too, to serve him; and that by the worst and basest of services, which is, by making themselves like him. It is but too notorious, how long vice has reigned, or rather raged, amongst us; and with what a *bare face*, and a *brazen forehead*, it walks about the nation (as it were) *elato capite*, and looking down with scorn upon virtue as a contemptible and a mean thing. Vice could not come to this

pitch by chance. But we have finned apace, and at an higher strain of villainy, than the *fops our ancestors* (as some are pleased to call them) could ever arrive to. So that we daily see maturity and age in vice joined with youth and greenness of years. A manifest argument, no doubt, of the great docility and pregnancy of parts, that is in the present age, above all the former.

For, in respect of vice, nothing is more usual now-a-days, than for boys *illico nasci senes*. They see their betters delight in ill things; they observe reputation, and countenance to attend the practice of them; and this carries them on furiously to that, which of themselves they are but too much inclin'd to; and which laws were purposely made by wise men to keep them from. They are glad, you may be sure, to please and prefer themselves at once, and to serve their interest and their sensuality together.

And, as they are come to this height and rampancy of vice, in a great measure, from the countenance of their betters and superiors; so they have took some steps higher in the same from this, that the follies and extravagances of the young too frequently carry with them the suffrage and approbation of the old. For age, which naturally and unavoidably is
but

but one remove from death, and consequently should have nothing about it, but what looks like a decent preparation for it, scarce ever appears of late days, but in the high mode, the flaunting garb, and utmost gaudery of youth ; with cloaths as ridiculous, and as much in the fashion, as the person that wears them is usually grown out of it. The eldest equal the youngest in the vanity of their *dress*, and no other reason can be given of it, but that they equal, if not surpass, them in the vanity of their *desires*. So that those, who, by the majesty, and (as I may so say) the prerogative of their age, should even frown youth into sobriety, and better manners, are now striving all they can, to imitate and strike in with them, and to be really *vicious*, that they may be *thought* to be *young*.

The sad and apparent truth of which, makes it very superfluous to inquire after any further cause of that monstrous increase of vice, that, like a torrent, or rather a breaking of the sea upon us, has of late years overflow'd, and victoriously carried away all before it. Both the honourable and the aged have contributed all they could to the promotion of it ; and, so far as they are able, to give the best colour to the worst of things. This they have endeavoured, and thus much they have effected, that
men

234 *Of taking pleasure, &c.* Serm.6.

men now see, that vice makes them acceptable to those, who are able to make them considerable. It is the key that lets them into their very heart, and enables them to command all that is there. And if this be the price of favour, and the market of honour, no doubt, where the trade is so quick, and withal so certain, multitudes will be sure to follow it.

This is too manifestly our present case. All men see it: And wise and good men lament it: And, where vice, push'd on with such mighty advantages, will stop its progress, it is hard to judge: It is certainly above all human remedies to controul the prevailing course of it; unless the great Governor of the world, who quells the rage and swelling of the sea, and *sets bars and doors to it, beyond which the proudest of its waves cannot pass*, shall, in his infinite compassion to us, do the same to that *ocean of vice*, which now *swells and roars*, and *lifts up itself above all banks and bounds of human laws*; and so, by his omnipotent word, reducing its power, and abasing its pride, shall at length say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther*. Which God in his good time effect.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

Natural

*Natural Religion, without Revelation,
sufficient to render a sinner inexcusable:*

A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

U N I V E R S I T Y,

A T

CHRIST-CHURCH, *Oxon.*

On November 2. 1690.

Se

=
=

S

N

—

—

for

un

kin

ha

th

el

we

an

th

SERMON VII.

Natural Religion, without Revelation, sufficient to render a Sinner inexcusable.

ROM. i. 20. latter part.

— *So that they are without excuse.*

THIS excellent epistle, though in the front of it, it bears a *particular* inscription; yet, in the drift and purpose of it, is *universal*; as designing to convince all mankind (whom it supposes in pursuit of true happiness) of the necessity of seeking for it in the Gospel, and the impossibility of finding it elsewhere. All without the church, at that time, were comprehended under the division of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, called here by the apostle *Greeks*; the nobler and more noted part being used for
the

238 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

the whole. Accordingly, from the second chapter, down along, he addressees himself to the *Jews*, shewing the insufficiency of *their law* to justify, or make them happy, how much soever they doated upon it. But here, in this first chapter, he deals with the *Greeks*, or *Gentiles*, who sought for, and promised themselves the same happiness from the dictates of *right reason*, which the *Jews* did from the *Mosaick Law*. Where, after he had took an account of what their bare reason had taught them in the things of God, and compared the superstructure with the foundation, their practice with their knowledge, he finds them so far from arriving at the *happiness*, which they aspired to by this means, that upon a full survey of the whole matter, the result of all comes to this sad and deplorable issue, that they were sinful and miserable, and *that without excuse*. In the words, taken with the coherence of the precedent and subsequent verses, we have these four things considerable.

I. The *sin* here followed, upon a certain sort of men, with this so severe a judgment; namely, that *knowing God, they did not glorify him as God*, ver. 22.

II. The *persons* guilty of this sin; they were *such as professed themselves wise*, ver. 22.

III. The

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 239

III. The *cause* or *reason* of their falling into this sin; which was their *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, ver. 18. And,

IV. And *Lastly*, The *judgment*, or rather the *state and condition* *penally consequent* upon these sinners; namely, *that they were without excuse*, ver. 20.

Of each of which in their order: And first, for the first of them.

The sin here followed with so severe a judgment, and so highly aggravated and condemn'd by the apostle, is, by the united testimony of most divines upon this place, the sin of *idolatry*: which the apostle affirms to consist in this; *that the gentiles glorified not God, as God*. Which *general charge* he also draws forth into *particulars*: As, that they *changed his glory into the similitude and images of men, and beasts, and birds*; where, by *glory*, he means *God's worship*; to wit, that by which men glorify him, and not the *essential glory* of his nature; it being such a glory, as was in mens power to *change*, and to *debase*; and therefore must needs consist, either in those actions, or those means, which they performed the divine worship by. I know no place, from which we may more clearly gather, what the Scripture accounts *idolatry*, than from this chapter. From whence, that I may represent to you, what

240 *Sinners inexcusable from* Sermon. 7.

what *idolatry* is, and wherein one sort of it (at least) does consist, you may observe, that the persons who are here charged with it, are positively affirmed to have known, and acknowledged the true God. For it is said of them, that they knew his *eternal Power* and *Godhead*, in this 20th verse; nay, and they *worshipped* him too. From whence this undeniably and invincibly follows, that they did not *look upon* those *images*, which they addressed to, as *gods*, nor as things, in which the Divine Nature did, or could *inclose* itself; nor, consequently, to which they gave, or ultimately designed their religious worship. This conclusion therefore I infer, and assert; that *idolatry* is not only an accounting, or worshipping that for God, which is not God, but it is also a worshipping the true God, in a way wholly unsuitable to his nature; and particularly, by the mediation of images, and corporeal resemblances of Him. This is idolatry: For the persons here spoken of pretended *to glorify the true God, but they did not glorify him, as God*, and upon that account stand arraigned for *idolaters*. Common sense and experience will, and must evince the truth of this: for, can any one imagine, that men of reason, who had their senses quick, and their
wits

wits and discourse intire, could take that *image* or *statue*, which they fell down before, to be a *God*? Could they think that to be *infinite* and *immense*, the ubiquity of which they could thrust into a corner of their closet? Or, could they conceive that to be *eternal*, which a few days before they had seen a log, or a rude trunk, and perhaps the other piece of it a joint-stool in the workman's shop?

The ground and reason of all *worship*, is an opinion of *power* and *will*, in the person worshipped, to answer and supply our desires; which he cannot possibly do, unless he first apprehend them. But can any man, who is master of sense himself, believe the rational heathens so void of it, as to think, that those *images* could fulfil the petitions which they could not hear, pity the wants they could not see, do all things, when they could not stir an hand, or a foot? 'Tis impossible they should; but it is also certain, that they were *idolaters*.

And therefore it is clear, that their idolatry consisted in something else, and the history of it would demonstrate so much, were it proper to turn a sermon into an history. So that we see here, that the sin condemned in the text, was the *worshipping of the true God by images*. For the defence of which, there is no doubt, but they might have pleaded, and did plead,

242 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

for those *images*, that they used them not as *objects*, but only as *means* and instruments of divine worship, not as *what they worshipped*, but as *that by which they directed their worship to God*. Though still, methinks, it is something hard to conceive, that none of the worship should fall upon the image by the way, or that the water can be conveyed into the sea without so much as wetting the channel thro' which it passes. But however you see, it requires a very distinguishing head, and an even hand, and no small skill in *directing the intention*, to carry a prayer quite through to its journey's end : Though, after all, the mischief of it is, that the *distinction*, which looks so fine in the *theory*, generally miscarries in the *practice* ; especially where the ignorant vulgar are the *practisers*, who are the worst in the world at distinguishing, but yet make far the greatest part of mankind, and are as much concerned, and obliged to pray, as the wisest, and the best ; but withal, infinitely unhappy, if they cannot perform a necessary duty without *school-distinctions*, nor beg their *daily bread* without *metaphysics*. And thus much for the *first thing proposed* ; namely, *the sin here spoken against by the apostle in the text*, which was *idolatry*.

2. The second is *the persons charged with this sin*. And they were not the *Gnosticks*, as some

Serm. 7. *Natural Religion only.* 243

some whimsically imagine, who can never meet with the words γνώσκοντες, γνώσκειν, γνώης, or γνωσόν, but presently the *Gnosticks* must be drawn in by the head and shoulders; but the persons here meant, were plainly and manifestly the old heathen philosophers; such as not only in the *apostles*, but also in their *own phrase*, professed themselves to be wise. Their great title was σοφοί, and the word of applause still given to their lectures, was σοφῶς. And *Pythagoras* was the first, who abated of the invidiousness of the name, and from σοφός, brought it down to φιλόσοφος, from a *master*, to a *lover of wisdom*, from a professor, to a candidate.

These were the men here intended by *S. Paul*; men famous in their respective ages; the great favourites of nature, and the top and masterpiece of art; men, whose aspiring intellectuals had raised them above the common level, and made them *higher by the head*, than the world round about them. Men of a polite reason, and a notion refined and enlarged by meditation. Such, as with all these advantages of parts and study, had been toiling and plodding many years, to out-wit and deceive themselves; sat up many nights, and spent many days, to impose a fallacy upon their reason; and, in a word, ran the round of all the arts

244 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm. 7.

and sciences, to arrive at length at a glorious and elaborate folly; even these, I say, these grandees, and giants in knowledge, who thus *look'd down* (as it were) upon the rest of mankind, and laughed at all besides themselves, as *barbarous* and insignificant, (as quick and sagacious as they were, to look into the little intricacies of *matter* and *motion*, which a man might *salva scientia*, or at least, *salva anima, ignorare*) yet blundered and stumbled about their grand and principal concern, the *knowledge of their duty to God*, sinking into the meanest and most ridiculous instances of *idolatry*: even so far as to worship the great God under the form of *beasts, and creeping things*; to adore Eternity and Immensity in a brute, or a plant, or some viler thing; bowing down in their adoration to such things, as they would scarce otherwise have bowed down *to take up*: Nay, and to rear temples, and make altars to *fear, lust, and revenge*; there being scarce a corrupt passion of the mind, or a distemper of the body, but what they *worshipped*. So that it could not be expected, that they should ever *repent* of those sins, which they thought fit to *deify*, nor *mortify* those corrupt affections to which they ascribed a kind of *divinity* and *immortality*. By all which, they fell into a
greater

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 245

greater absurdity in matter of *practice*, than ever any one of them did, in point of opinion, (which yet certainly was very hard) namely, *that having confessed a God*, and allowed him the perfections of a God, to wit, an *infinite Power*, and an *eternal Godhead*, they yet denied him the *worship of God*: Thus reversing the great truths they had subscribed to in *speculation*, by a brutish, senseless devotion, managed with a greater prostration of reason, than of body.

Had the poor, vulgar rout only, who were held under the prejudices and prepossessions of education, been abused into such idolatrous superstitions, as to adore a marble, or a golden deity, it might have been detested indeed, or pitied, but not so much to be wondered at: But for the *Stoa*, the *Academy*, or the *Peripateton* to own such a paradox; for an *Aristotle*, or a *Plato*, to think their Νῆς αἰδιον, their *Eternal Mind*, or *Universal Spirit*, to be found in, or served by the images of *four-footed beasts*; for the *Stagirite* to recognize his gods in his own book *de animalibus*; This (as the apostle says) *was without excuse*: And how will these men answer for their sins, who stand thus condemn'd for their devotions? And thus from the *persons here charged by the apostle with the sin of idolatry*, pass we now to the

246 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

3. *Thing proposed* ; namely, *The cause, or reason of their falling into this sin ; and that was their holding of the truth in unrighteousness.* For the making out of which, we must inquire into these two things.

1. What was the *truth* here spoken of.

2. How they *held it in unrighteousness.*

For the first of them, there were *these six great truths*, the knowledge of which the *Gentile* philosophers stood accountable for: As,

1. That there was *a God* ; a Being distinct from this *visible, material world* ; infinitely perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, transcendently good and holy : for all this is included in the very notion of a God. And this was a truth wrote with a sun-beam, clear and legible to all mankind, and *received by universal consent.*

2. That this God was the *Maker and Governor* of this *visible world.* The first of which was evident from the very *order of causes* ; the great argument by which natural reason evinces a God. It being necessary in such an *order or chain of causes*, to ascend to, and terminate in *some first* ; which should be the original of motion, and the cause of all other things, but itself be caused by none. And then, that God
also

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 247

also *governed* the world, this followed from the other; for that a creature should not depend upon its Creator in all respects, in which it is capable of depending upon him, (amongst which, to be *governed* by him, is certainly one) is contrary to the common order and nature of things, and those essential relations, which (by virtue thereof) they bear to one another; and consequently absurd and impossible. So that upon a bare principle of reason, *creation* must needs infer *providence*; and God's *making* the world, irrefragably prove that he *governs* it too; or, that a being of a *dependent* nature remains nevertheless *independent* upon him in that respect. Besides all which, it is also certain, that the heathens did actually acknowledge the world governed by a Supreme Mind; which knowledge, whether they had it from tradition, or the discourses of reason, they stood however *equally accountable* for upon either account.

3. That this God, or Supreme Being, was to be *worshipped*. For this was founded upon his *omnipotence*, and his *providence*. Since He, who could preserve, or destroy, as he pleased, and withal governed the world, ought surely to be depended upon by those, who were thus obnoxious to his power, and subject to his government; which *dependence* could not mani-

248 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

fest itself, but by acts of *worship, homage,* and *address* to the person thus depended upon.

4. That this God was to be worshipped, or addressed to, by virtuous and pious practices. For so much his essential holiness required, and those innate notions of *turpe & honestum*, wrote in the consciences of all men, and joined with the apprehensions they had of the infinite purity of the divine *Nature*, could not but suggest.

5. That upon any deviation from virtue and piety, it was the duty of every *rational creature* so deviating, to condemn, renounce, and be sorry for every such deviation: that is, in other words, *to repent of it*. What, indeed, the issue or effect of such a repentance might be, bare reason could not of itself discover; but that a *peccant creature* should disapprove, and repent of every violation of, and declination from the rules of *just* and *honest*, this, right reason discoursing upon the stock of its own principles, could not but infer. And the conscience of every man, before it is debauched, and hardened by habitual sin, will *recoil* after the doing of an evil action, and *acquit him* after a good.

6. And *lastly*, That every such deviation from *duty*, rendered the person so deviating liable,

Serm. 7. *Natural Religion only.* 249

liable, and obnoxious to *punishment*. I do not say, that it made punishment *necessary*, but that it made the person so transgressing *worthy* of it: So that it might justly be inflicted on him, and consequently ought rationally to be feared and expected by him. And upon this notion, universally fixed in the minds of men, were grounded all their *sacrifices* and *rites* of *expiation*, and *lustration*. The use of which has been so general, both as to times and places, that there is no age or nation of the world, in which they have not been used, as principal parts of religious worship.

Now these *six grand truths* were the *talent* entrusted and deposited by God in the hands of the *Gentiles* for them to traffick with, to his honour, and their own happiness. But what little improvement they made of this *noble talent*, shall now be shewn in the next particular; namely, *their holding of it in unrighteousness*; which they did several ways. As,

1. *By not acting up to what they knew.* As in many things their *knowledge* was short of the *truth*, so almost in all things, their *practice* fell short of their *knowledge*. The principles by which they *walked*, were as much below those by which they *judged*, as their *feet* were below their *head*. By the one they looked *upwards*, while they placed the other *in the dirt*.

Their

250 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm. 7.

Their writings sufficiently shew, what raised and sublime notions they had of the divine nature, while they employed their reason about that glorious object, and what excellent discourses of virtue and morality the same reason enabled them to furnish the world with. But when they came to transcribe these *theories* into *practice*, one seemed to be of no other use to them at all, but only to reproach them for the other. For, they neither depended upon this God, as if he were *almighty*, nor worshipped him, as if they believed him *holy*; but in both prevaricated with their own principles, to that degree, that their *practice* was a direct contradiction to their *speculations*. For the proof of which, go over all the heathen *temples*, and take a survey of the absurdities and impieties of their *worship*, their monstrous sacrifices, their ridiculous rites and ceremonies. In all which, common sense and reason could not but tell them, that the *good* and *gracious* God could not be *pleased*, nor consequently *worshipped*, with any thing *barbarous* or *cruel*; nor the most *holy* God with any thing *filthy* and *unclean*; nor a God *infinitely wise* with any thing *foolish* or *ridiculous*; and yet these were the worthy qualifications of the heathen worship, even amongst their greatest, and most reputed philosophers.

And

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 251

And then, for the *duties of morality*; surely they never wanted so much knowledge as to inform, and convince them of the unlawfulness of a man's being *a murderer, an hater of God, a covenant-breaker, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.* These were enormities, branded and condemned by the *first and most natural* verdict of common *humanity*; and so very gross and foul, that no man could pretend ignorance, that they ought to be avoided by him: And yet the apostle tells us, in the last verse of this chapter, that they *practised* so much short of their *knowledge*, even as to these particulars, *that, though they knew the judgment of God, that those who committed such things, were worthy of death; yet, not only did the same themselves, but also had pleasure in those that did them.* Which certainly is the greatest demonstration of a mind wholly possessed, and even besotted with the love of vice, that can possibly be imagined. So notoriously did these wretches baulk the judgment of their consciences, even in the plainest and most undeniable duties relating to God, their neighbour, and *themselves*; as if they had owned neither God, nor neighbour, but *themselves*.

2. These men held the truth in *unrighteousness*, by not improving those known principles, into the proper consequences deducible from them.

For

252 *Sinners inexcusable from* Sermon. 7.

For surely, had they discoursed rightly but upon this one principle, that God was a *Being infinitely perfect*, they could never have been brought to assert, or own a multiplicity of Gods. For can *one God* include in him all perfection, and another God include in him *all perfection* too? Can there be any more than all? And if this all be in one, can it be also in another? Or, if they allot, and parcel out several perfections to several deities, do they not, by this, assert contradictions, making a *deity* only to such a measure perfect; whereas a *deity*, as such, implies perfection beyond all measure or limitation? Nor could they, in the next place, have slid into those brutish immoralities of life, had they duly manured those first practical notions, and dictates of right reason which the nature of man is originally *furnished* with; there being not any one of them, but what is *naturally* productive of many more. But they quickly stifled and *over-laid* those *infant principles*, those seeds of piety and virtue, sown by God and nature in their own hearts; so that they brought a voluntary darkness and stupidity upon their minds; and, by not *exercising their senses to discern between good and evil*, came at length to lose all sense and discernment of either. Whereupon, as the apostle says of them in the 21st verse of this

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 253

this chapter to the *Romans*, *their foolish heart was darkened*: And that, not only by the just judgment of God, but also by the very course of nature; nothing being more evident from experience, than that the not using or employing any faculty, or power either of body, or soul, does insensibly weaken and impair that faculty; as a sword by long lying still will contract a rust, which shall not only deface its *brightness*, but, by degrees, also, consume its very *substance*: *Doing nothing naturally ends in being nothing.*

It holds in all operative principles whatsoever; but especially in such as relate to morality; in which *not to proceed*, is certainly *to go backward*; there being *no third estate*, between *not advancing*, and *retreating* in a virtuous course. Growth is of the very essence and nature of some things. *To be*, and to *thrive*, is all one with them; and they know no middle season between their *spring* and their *fall*.

And therefore, as it is said in *Matth. xiii. 12.* *That from him, who hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath*: so he, who neglects the *practice*, shall, in the end also, lose the very *power* and faculty of doing well. That which stops a mans *actual breathing* very long, will, in the issue, take away his
very

254 *Sinners inexcusable from* Sermon 7.

very power of breathing too. To hide one's *talent* in the ground, is to *bury* it; and the *burial* of a thing either finds it *dead*, or will quickly *make it so*.

3. These men *held the truth in unrighteousness, by concealing what they knew*. For, how rightly soever they might conceive of *God*, and of *virtue*, yet the illiterate multitude, who in such things must see with better eyes than their own, or see not at all, were never the wiser for it. Whatsoever the inward sentiments of those *Sophisters* were, they kept them wholly to themselves; hiding all those important truths, all those useful notions from the people, and teaching the world much otherwise from what they judged themselves. Though I think a greater truth than this cannot well be uttered; that never any thing, or person was really good, which was good only to itself. But, from hence it was, that, even in a literal sense, *sin came to be established by a law*. For, amongst the *Gentiles*, the *laws* themselves were the greatest *offenders*. They made little or no provision for virtue, but very much for vice. For the early and universal practice of sin had turned it into a *custom*, and *custom*, especially in *sin*, quickly passed into *common law*.

Socrates

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 255

Socrates was the only martyr for the testimony of any truth, that we read of amongst the *beathens*; who chose rather to be condemned, and to die, than either to renounce, or conceal his judgment, touching the unity of the Godhead. But as for the rest of them, even *Zeno* and *Chrysippus*, *Plato* and *Aristotle*, and generally all those heroes in philosophy, they swam with the stream, (as foul as it ran) leaving the poor vulgar as ignorant and sottish, as vicious and idolatrous as they first found them.

But it has been always the practice of the governing cheats of all religions, to keep the people in as gross ignorance as possibly they could. For (we see) the *beathen impostors* used it before the *christian impostors* took it up and improved it. *Si populus decipi vult, decipiat*, was ever a gold and silver rule amongst them all; though the Pope's Legate first turned it into a *benediction*: And a very strange one it was, and enough (one would think) to have made all that heard it look about them, and begin to *blefs themselves*. For as *Demetrius*, a great master in such arts, told his fellow artists, *Acts* xix. 25. *It was by this craft that they got their wealth*: so, long experience has found it true of the *unthinking mobile*, that the closer they shut their eyes,

256 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm. 7.

eyes, the wider they open their hands. But this base trade the church of *England* always abhorr'd; and for that cause, as to its temporal advantages, has fared accordingly; and, by this time, may be thought fit for *another reformation*.

And thus I have shewn three notable ways, by which the *philosophers, and learned men amongst the Gentiles*, held the truth in *unrighteousness*: As first, *That they did not practise up to it*; 2. *That they did not improve it*; And 3. and lastly, *That they concealed and dissembled it*. And this was that, which prepared and disposed them to greater enormities: For, *changing the truth of God into a lye*, they became like those, who by often repeating a lye to others, came at length to believe it themselves. They owned the idolatrous worship of God so long, till by degrees, even in spite of *reason and nature*, they thought, that he ought so to be worshipped. But this stopped not here: For, as one wickedness is naturally a step and introduction to another; so, from absurd and senseless devotions, they passed into *vile affections*: practising vice against nature, and that, in such strange and abominable instances of sin, that nothing could equal the corruption of their *manners*, but the delusion of their *judgments*; both of them the true and proper causes of one another.

The

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 257

The consideration of which (one would think) should make men cautious and fearful, how they *suppress*, or debauch that *spark* of *natural light*, which God has set up in their souls. When nature *is in the dark*, it will venture to do any thing. And God knows how far the *spirit* of infatuation may prevail upon the heart, when it comes once to court and love a delusion. Some men hug an error, because it gratifies them in a freer enjoyment of their sensuality, and for that reason, God in judgment suffers them to be plunged into fouler and grosser errors; such as even unman and strip them of the very principles of reason, and sober discourse. For, surely, it could be no ordinary declension of nature, that could bring some men, after an ingenuous education in arts and philosophy, to place their *summum bonum* upon their trenchers, and their utmost felicity in wine and women, and those lusts and pleasures, which a *swine* or a *goat* has as full and quick a sense of, as the greatest statesman, or the best philosopher in the world.

Yet this was the custom, this the known voice of most of the *Gentiles*: *Dum vivimus, vivamus*; *Let us eat and drink to day, for to morrow we must die*. That soul which God had given them, comprehensive of both worlds, and capable of looking into the great myste-

258 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

ries of nature, of diving into the depths beneath, and of understanding the motions and influences of the stars above, even this glorious active thing did they confine within the pitiful compass of the present fruition; forbidding it to take a prospect, so far as into the *morrow*; as if to think, to contemplate, or be serious, had been *high-treason* against the empire and prerogative of *sense*, usurping the throne of their baffled and deposed *reason*.

And how comes it to pass, that even now-a-days there is often seen such a vast difference between the *former* and the *latter* part of some mens lives? That those, who first stepp'd forth into the world, with high and promising abilities, vigorous intellectuals, and clear morals, come at length to grow sots and epicures, mean in their discourses, and dirty in their practices; but that, as by degrees, they remitted of their industry, loathed their business, and gave way to their pleasures, they let fall those generous principles, which, in their youthful days, had borne them upon the wing, and raised them to worthy and great thoughts; which *thoughts* and *principles* not being kept up and cherished, but smother'd in sensual delights, God, for that cause, suffered them to flag and sink into low and inglorious satisfactions, and to enjoy themselves more in a *revel*, or a *merry-meeting*, a

strum-

Serm. 7. *Natural Religion only.* 259

strumpet, or a *tavern*, than in being useful to a church or a nation, in being a publick good to society, and a benefit to mankind. The parts that God gave them, they *beld in unrighteousness*, sloth, and sensuality; and this made God to desert and abandon them to themselves; so that they have had a *doating* and a *decrepit* reason, long before age had given them such a *body*.

And therefore I could heartily wish, that such young persons as hear me now, would lodge this one observation deep in their minds, *viz.* that God and nature have joined *wisdom* and *virtue* by such a near cognation, or rather, such an inseparable connexion, that a wise, a prudent, and an honourable *old age*, is seldom or never found, but as the *reward* and *effect* of a sober, a virtuous, and a well-spent *youth*.

4. I descend now to the *fourth* and *last* thing proposed; namely, *the judgment, or rather the state and condition penally consequent upon the persons here charged by the apostle with idolatry*; which is, *that they were without excuse*.

After the commission of sin, it is natural for the sinner to apprehend himself in danger, and, upon such apprehension, to provide for his safety and defence: and that must be one of these two ways; *viz.* either by *pleading his innocence*, or by *using his power*. But since it

260 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

would be infinitely in vain for a *finite* power to contend with an *infinite, innocence* (if any thing) must be his plea; and that must be either by an absolute denial, or at least, by an extenuation or diminution of his sin. Though indeed this course will be found altogether as absurd as the other could be; it being every whit as irrational for a sinner to plead his *innocence* before *Omniscience*, as it would be to oppose his *power to Omnipotence*. However, the last refuge of a guilty person, is to take shelter under an *excuse*, and so to mitigate, if he cannot divert, the blow. It was the method of the great pattern and parent of all sinners, *Adam*, first to *hide*, and then to excuse himself; to wrap the *apple* in the leaves, and to give his case a gloss at least, though not a defence. But now, when the sinner shall be stripp'd of this also, have all his excuses blown away, be stabb'd with his own arguments, and (as it were) sacrificed upon that very *altar*, which he fled to for *succour*; this, surely, is the height and *crisis* of a forlorn condition: Yet this was the case of the malefactors, who stand here arraigned *in the text*; this was the consummation of their doom, that they were persons, not only unfit for a *pardon*, but even for a *plea*.

Now an *excuse*, in the nature of it, imports these two things.

I. The

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 261

1. The supposition of a sin.
2. The extenuation of its guilt.

As for the sin itself, we have already heard what that was; and we will now see how able they are to acquit themselves in point of its *extenuation*. In which, according to the two grand principles of human actions, which determine their morality, the *understanding* and the *will*, the excuse must derive either from *ignorance* or *unwillingness*.

As for *unwillingness*, (to speak of this last first) the heathen philosophers generally asserted *the freedom of the will*, and its inviolable dominion over its own actions; so that no force or coercion from without could intrench upon the absolute empire of this faculty.

It must be confessed indeed, that it has been something lamed in this its *freedom* by original sin: of which defect the heathens themselves were not wholly ignorant, tho' they were of its cause. So that hereupon the will is not able to carry a man out to a *choice* so perfectly and in all respects good, but that still there is some adherent circumstance of imperfection, which, in strictness of *morality*, renders every action of it evil; according to that known, and most true rule, *Malum ex quolibet defectu*.

Nevertheless, the will has still so much *freedom* left, as to enable it to chuse any act *in its*

262 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

kind good, whether it be an act of *temperance*, *justice*, or the like ; as also to refuse any act in *its kind evil*, whether of *intemperance*, *injustice*, or the like ; tho' yet, it neither *chuses* one, nor *refuses* the other, with such a perfect concurrence of all due ingredients of action, but that still, in the sight of God, judging according to the rigid measures of the law, every such *choice* or *refusal* is indeed sinful and imperfect. This is most certain, whatsoever *Pelagius* and his brethren assert to the contrary.

But however, that measure of *freedom* which the will still retains, of being able to chuse any *act*, *materially*, and in *its kind good*, and to refuse the contrary, was enough to cut off all excuse from the heathen, who never duly improved the utmost of such a power, but gave themselves up to all the filthiness and licentiousness of life imaginable. In all which, it is certain, that they acted willingly, and without *compulsion* ; or rather indeed greedily, and without *controul*.

The only persons amongst the heathens, who sophisticated nature and philosophy in this particular, were the *Stoicks* ; who affirmed a fatal, unchangeable concatenation of causes, reaching even to the elicit acts of man's will : so that, according to them, there was no *act of volition* exerted by it ; but, all circumstances

con-

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 263

considered, it was impossible for the will not to exert that volition. Yet these were but one sect of philosophers; that is, but an handful in comparison of the rest of the *Gentiles*: Ridiculous enough for what they held and taught, and consequently not to be laid in the balance with the united judgment of all other learned men in the world, unanimously exploding this opinion. Questionless therefore, a thing so deeply engraven upon the first and most inward notions of man's mind, as a persuasion of the *will's freedom*, would never permit the *heathens* (who are here charged by the apostle) to patronize and excuse their sins upon this score; *that they committed them against their will, and that they had no power to do otherwise.* In which every hour's experience, and reflexion upon the method of their own actings, could not but give them the lye to their face.

The only *remaining plea* therefore, which these men can take sanctuary in, must be that of *ignorance*, since there could be no pretence for *unwillingness*. But the apostle divests them even of this also: for he says expressly, in ver. 19. *That what might be known of God*, that famous and so much disputed of τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, was *manifested in them*; and in ver. 21. their *inexcusableness* is stated upon the supposition of this very thing; *That they knew God*, but

264 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

for all that, *did not glorify him as God*. This was the sum of their charge ; and how it has been made good against them, we have already shewn, in what we have spoken about their *idolatry*, very briefly, I confess ; but enough to shew its *absurdity*, though not to account for its *variety* ; when *Vossius's* very abridgment of it makes a thick volume in *Folio*.

The *plea of ignorance* therefore is also taken out of their hands ; forasmuch as they knew that there was a God, and that this God made and governed the world ; and upon that account was to be worshipped and addressed to, and that with such a worship, as should be agreeable to his nature ; both in respect of the piety and virtue of the *worshipper*, and also of the means of the *worship* itself. So that he was neither to be worshipped with impious and immoral practices, nor with corporeal resemblances. For how could an *image* help men in directing their thoughts to a *Being*, which bore no similitude or cognation to that *image* at all ? And what resemblance could *wood* or *stone* bear to a *Spirit* void of all sensible qualities, and bodily dimensions ? How could they put men in mind of *infinite Power*, *Wisdom*, and *Holiness*, and such other Attributes, of which they had not the least mark or character ?

But

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 265

But now, if these things could not possibly resemble any *perfection* of the *Deity*, what use could they be of to men in their addresses to God? For, can a man's devotions be helped by that, which brings an error upon his thoughts? And certain it is, that it is natural for a man, by directing his prayers to an *image*, to suppose the *Being* he prays to represented by that *image*. Which how injurious, how contumelious it must needs be to the glorious, incomprehensible nature of God, by begetting such false and low apprehensions of him in the minds of his creatures, let *common sense*, not perverted by interest and design, be judge. From all which it follows, That the *idolatrous heathens*, and especially the most learned of them, not being able to charge their idolatry either upon *ignorance* or *unwillingness*, were wholly without excuse. So that it is to be feared, that *Averroes* had not the right way of blessing himself, when, in defiance of christianity, he wished, *Sit anima mea cum philosophis*.

And now, after all, I cannot but take notice, that all that I have said of the heathen idolatry is so exactly applicable to the idolatry of another sort of men in the world, that one would think, this *first chapter* of the epistle to the *Romans*, were not so much an address to the *ancient Romans*, as a description of the *modern*.

But

266 *Sinners inexcusable from* Serm.7.

But to draw towards a close. The use and improvement of the foregoing discourse shall be briefly to inform us of these two things.

I. The signally great and peculiar *mercy of God* to those to whom he has revealed the Gospel, since there was nothing that could have obliged him to it, upon the account of his *justice*: for if there had, the *heathens*, to whom he revealed it not, could not have *been thus without excuse*; but might very rationally have expostulated the case with their great Judge, and demurred to the equity of the sentence, had they been condemned by him. But it appears from hence, that what was sufficient to render men *inexcusable*, was not therefore sufficient to *save* them.

It is not said by the *apostle*, nor can it be proved by any one else, that God vouchsafed to the *heathens* the means of salvation, if so be the *gospel* be the only means of it. And yet I will not, I dare not affirm, that God will save none of those, to whom the sound of the gospel never reached: Though this is evident, that if he does save any of them, it must not be by that ordinary, stated, appointed method, which the Scripture has revealed to us, and which they were wholly ignorant of. For grant, that the *heathens* knew that there was a God, who both made and governed the world; and who,
upon

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 267

upon that account, was to be worshipped, and that with such a worship, as should be suitable to such a *Being* ; yet what principle of mere reason could assure them, that *this God would be a rewarder of such as diligently sought and served him?* For certain it is, that there is nothing in the nature of God to *oblige* him to reward any service of his creature ; forasmuch as all the creature can do, is but *duty* ; and even now, at this time, God has no other obligation upon him, but his own free promise, to reward the piety and obedience of his servants ; which promise reason of itself could never have found out, till God made it known by revelation. And moreover, what principle of reason could assure a man that God *would pardon* finners upon any terms whatsoever ? Possibly it might know, *that God could do so* ; but this was no sufficient ground for men to depend upon. And then, last of all, as for the way of his pardoning finners, that he should do it upon a *satisfaction* paid to his *justice*, by such a Saviour, as should be *both God and man* ; this was utterly impossible for all the reason of mankind to find out.

For, that these things could be read in the *book of nature*, or the common works of God's providence, or be learned *by the sun and moon's preaching the gospel*, as some have fondly (not
to

268 *Sinners inexcusable from* Sermon 7.

to say profanely) enough asserted, it is infinitely foolish to imagine, and can indeed be nothing else, but the *turning the grace of God into wanton* and unreasonable propositions.

It is clear therefore, that the *heathens* had no knowledge of *that way*, by which *alone* we expect salvation. So that all the hope which we can have for them, is, that the *gospel* may not be the *utmost limit* of the Divine Mercy; but that the merit of Christ may overflow and run over the pale of the church, so as to reach *even* many of those who lived and died invincibly ignorant of him.

But whether this shall be so, or no, God alone knows, who only is privy to the great counsels of his own will. It is a *secret* hid from us; and therefore, though we may hope compassionately, yet, I am sure, we can pronounce nothing certainly; it is enough for us, that God has asserted his *justice*, even in his dealing with those, whom he treats not upon terms of evangelical mercy. So that such persons can neither *excuse themselves*, nor yet *accuse him*; who, in the severest sentence that he can pronounce upon the sinner, will (as the *Psalmist* tells us) *be justified when he speaks, and clear when he is judged*.

2. In the next place, we gather hence the unspeakably wretched and deplorable condition
of

Serm.7. *Natural Religion only.* 269

of obstinate finners under the Gospel. The sun of mercy has shined too long and too bright upon such, to leave them any shadow of *excuse*. For let them argue over all the topicks of *divine goodness*, and *human weakness*, and whatsoever other pretences poor, sinking finners are apt to catch at, to support and save themselves by; yet, how trifling must be their plea! how impertinent their defence!

For, admit an impenitent heathen to plead, that albeit his conscience told him, that he had sinned; yet it could not tell him, that there was any provision of mercy for him upon his repentance. He knew not whether amendment of life would be accepted after the law was once broke; or, that there was any other *righteousness* to atone, or merit for him, but his own.

But no christian, who has been taken into the arms of a better covenant, and grown up in the knowledge of a Saviour, and the doctrine of *faith* and *repentance* from dead works, can speak so much as one plausible word for his impenitence. And therefore it was said of him who came to the *marriage-feast without a wedding-garment*, that, being charged and apprehended for it, ἐπιμωδῶν he was speechless, struck with *shame* and *silence*, the proper effects of an over-powering guilt, too manifest

270 *Sinners inexcusable, &c.* Serm. 7.

to be denied, and too gross to be defended. His reason deserted, and his voice failed him, finding himself arraigned, convicted, and condemned in the court of his own conscience.

So that if, after all this, his great Judge had freely asked him, what he could alledge or say for himself, why he should not have judgment to die eternally, and sentence to be awarded according to the utmost rigour of the law, he could not, in this forlorn *case*, have made use of the very last plea of a cast *criminal*; nor so much as have cried, *Mercy, Lord, mercy*. For still his conscience would have replied upon him, that mercy had been offered, and abused; and, that the time of mercy was now past. And so, under this overwhelming conviction, every gospel-sinner must pass to his eternal execution, taking the whole load of his own damnation solely and intirely upon himself, and acquitting the most just God, *who is righteous in all his works, and holy in all his ways*.

*To whom (therefore) be render'd and ascribed,
as is most due, all praise, might, majesty,
and dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.*

Sacra-

Sacramental Preparation :

Set forth in a

S E R M O N

O N

MATTHEW xxii. 12.

Preach'd at

WESTMINSTER-ABBEY,

On the 8th of *APRIL*, 1688.

Being *Palm-Sunday*.

Se

S

C

An

T

of
able
a k
his
bide
roya
mac
com
unb

y

SERMON VIII.

Of Sacramental Preparation.

M A T. xxii. 12.

*And he saith unto him, Friend, how
camest thou in hither, not having a
Wedding Garment ?*

THE whole scheme of these words is figurative, as being a parabolical description of God's vouchsafing to the world the invaluable blessing of the gospel, by the similitude of a king, with great magnificence solemnizing his son's marriage, and with equal bounty bidding and inviting all about him to that royal solemnity; together with his severe animadversion, both upon those who would not come, and upon one who did come in a very unbeseeming manner.

276 ⁴ Of a worthy Preparation Serm.8.

For the better understanding of which words we must observe, that in all parables, two things are to be considered.

First, The scope and design of the parable:
And,

Secondly, The circumstantial passages, serving only to complete and make up the narration.

Accordingly, in our application of any parable to the thing designed and set forth by it, we must not look for an absolute and exact correspondence of all the circumstantial, or subservient passages of the metaphorical part of it, with just so many of the same, or the like passages in the thing intended by it; but it is sufficient, that there be a certain analogy, or agreement between them, as to the principal scope and design of both.

As for the design of this *parable*, it is, no doubt, to set forth the free offer of the gospel, with all its rich privileges, to the *Jewish* church and nation in the first place; and, upon their refusal of it, and God's rejection of them for that refusal, to declare the calling of the *Gentiles* in their room, by a free, unlimited tender of the gospel to all nations whatsoever; adding withal, a very dreadful and severe sentence upon those, who being so freely invited, and so generously admitted, to such high

Serm 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 277

high and undeserved privileges, should nevertheless abuse and despise them by an unworthy, wicked, and ungrateful deportment under them.

For men must not think that the gospel is all made up of *privilege* and *promise*, but that there is something of duty to be performed, as well as of privilege to be enjoyed. No welcome to a *wedding supper*, *without a wedding garment*; and no coming by a wedding garment for nothing. In all the transactions between God, and the souls of men, something is expected on both sides; there being a fixed, indissoluble, and (in the language of the parable) a kind of *marriage-tye* between duty and privilege, which renders them inseparable.

Now, though I question not, but that this parable of the *wedding supper* comprehends in it the whole complex of all the blessings and privileges exhibited by the gospel; yet, I conceive, that there is one *principal privilege* amongst all the rest, that it seems more peculiarly to aim at, or at least may more appositely and emphatically be applied to, than to any other whatsoever. And that is the blessed *sacrament of the Eucharist*, by which all the benefits of the gospel are in an higher, fuller and more divine manner conveyed to the faithful, than by any other duty or privilege be-

276 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm.8.

longing to our excellent religion. And for this, I shall offer these three following reasons.

1. Because the foundation of all parables, is (as we have shewn) some *analogy* or *similitude* between the tropical, or allusive part of the parable, and the thing couched under it, and intended by it. But now, of all the benefits, privileges, or ordinances of the gospel, which of them is there, that carries so natural a resemblance to a *wedding-supper* as that, which every one of a very ordinary discerning faculty may observe in the *sacrament of the Eucharist*? For, surely, neither the preaching of the word, nor yet the sacrament of baptism, bears any such *resemblance*, or affinity to it. But, on the other side, this sacrament of the Eucharist so livelily resembles, and so happily falls in with it, that it is indeed itself a *supper*, and is called a *supper*, and that by a genuine, proper, as well as a common, and received appellation.

2. This sacrament is not only with great propriety of speech called a *supper*; but moreover, as it is the grand and prime means of the nearest and most intimate union and conjunction of the soul with Christ, it may, with a peculiar significancy, be called also a *wedding-supper*. And, as Christ frequently in scripture owns himself related to the church, as an
husband

Serm.8. to the Holy Sacrament. 277

husband to a spouse: so, if these nuptial endearments, by which Christ gives himself to the soul, and the soul mutually gives itself to Christ, pass between Christ and believers in any ordinance of the gospel, doubtless it is most eminently and effectually in this. Which is another pregnant instance of the notable resemblance between this *divine sacrament*, and the *wedding-supper* in the parable; and, consequently, a farther argument of the elegant and expressive signification of one by the other.

3. And *lastly*, The very manner of celebrating this sacrament, which is by the *breaking of bread*, was the way and manner of transacting marriages in some of the *eastern* countries. Thus *Q. Curtius* reports, That when *Alexander the Great* married the *Persian Roxana*, the ceremony they used, was no other, but this; *Panem gladio divisum uterque libabat*, he divided a piece of bread with his sword, of which each of them took a part, and so thereby the nuptial rites were performed. Besides that this ceremony of *feasting* belongs most properly both to *marriage*, and to the *Eucharist*, as both of them have the nature of a *covenant*. And all covenants were, in old times, solemnized, and accompanied with festival *eating* and *drinking*; the persons newly confederate, always thereupon feasting together in token

278 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

of their full and perfect accord, both as to interest and affection.

And now these three considerations together, so exactly suiting the parable of the *wedding-supper* to this spiritual, divine banquet of the gospel, if it does not primarily, and in its first design, intend it; yet, certainly it may, with greater advantage of resemblance be applied to it, than to any other duty or privilege belonging to christianity.

Upon the warrant of which so very particular and extraordinary a cognation between them, I shall, at present, treat of the words wholly with reference to this sacred and divine solemnity, observing and gathering from them, as they lie in coherence with the foregoing and following parts of the parable, these two Propositions.

I. That to a worthy participation of the holy mysteries, and great privileges of the gospel; and particularly that of the *Lord's Supper*, there is indispensably required a suitable *preparation*.

II. That God is a strict observer of, and a severe animadverter upon such as presume to partake of those mysteries, without such a preparation.

And first, for the first of these, *viz. That to a worthy participation of the Holy Mysteries, &c.*

Now

Serm. 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 279

Now this proposition imports in it two things.

1. That to a right discharge of this duty, a *preparation* is necessary.

2. That every *preparation* is not sufficient. And first, for the

First of these: *That a preparation is necessary.* And this, I confess, is a subject, which I am heartily sorry, that any preacher should find it needful to speak so much as *one* word upon. For, would any man, in his wits, venture to die without *preparation*? And if not, let me tell you, that nothing less than that which will fit a man for death, can fit him for the sacrament. The truth is, there is nothing great or considerable in the world, which ought to be done, or *ventured upon*, without *preparation*: But, above all, how dangerous, sottish, and irrational is it, to engage in any thing, or action *extempore*, where the concern is *eternity*?

None but the careless and the confident (and few are confident but what are first careless) would rush rudely into the presence of a great man: And, shall we, in our applications to the great God, take that to be religion, which the common reason of mankind will not allow to be manners? The very rules of worldly civility might instruct men how to order their addresses to God. For who, that is to appear

280 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

before his *prince* or *patron*, would not view and review himself over and over, with all imaginable care and sollicitude, that there be nothing justly offensive in his habit, language, or behaviour? But especially, if he be vouchsafed the honour of his table, it would be infinitely more absurd, and shameful to appear foul and sordid there; and in the dress of the *kitchen*, receive the entertainments of the *parlour*.

What previous cleansings, and consecrations, and what peculiar vestments were the priests, under the law, enjoined to use, when they were to appear before God in the sanctuary! And all this upon no less a penalty than death. This, and this they were to do, *lest they died*, lest God should strike them dead upon the spot: As we read in *Levit. viii. 35.* and in many other places in the books of *Moses*. And so exact were the *Jews* in their preparations for the solemn times of God's worship, that every *σάββατον* had its *παρασάββατον* or *ἑξαήμερον*, that is a part of the sixth day, from the hour of six in the *evening*, to fit them for the duties of the seventh day: Nor was this all; but they had also a *προπαρασάββατον*, beginning *about three in the afternoon*, to prepare them for that: And indeed, the whole day was, in a manner, but preparative to the next; several

Serm. 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 281

several works being disallowed and forborn amongst them on that day, which were not so upon any of the foregoing *five*: So careful, even to scrupulosity, were they to keep their *sabbath* with due reverence, and devotion, that they must not only have a time to prepare them for that, but a farther time also, to prepare them for their very *preparations*.

Nay, and the heathens (many of them at least) when they were to sacrifice to their greatest, and most revered deities, used, on the evening before, to have a certain preparative rite or ceremony, called by them *Cæna pura*; That is, a supper, consisting of some peculiar meats, in which they imagined a kind of holiness; and, by eating of which, they thought themselves sanctified, and fitted to officiate about the mysteries of the ensuing festival. And what were all their *lustrations*, but so many solemn purifyings, to render both themselves, and their sacrifices, acceptable to their gods?

So that we see here a concurrence both of the *Jews* and *Heathens* in this practice, before christianity ever appeared. Which, to me, is a kind of demonstration, that the necessity of mens preparing themselves for the sacred offices of religion, was a lesson, which the mere light and dictates of common reason, without the
help

282 *Of a worthy Preparation* Sermon. 8.

help of revelation, taught all the knowing and intelligent part of the world.

I will wash my hands in innocency (says David) *and so will I compass thine altar*, Psal. xxvi. 6. And as the apostle told the Hebrews, Heb. xiii. 10. *We also*, We christians, *have an altar* as well as they; an altar as sacred, an altar to be approached with as much awe and reverence; and though there be no fire upon it, yet there is a dreadful one that follows it. A fire, that does not indeed consume the offering; but such an one, as will be sure to seize, and prey upon the unworthy offerer, *I will be sanctified* (says God) *in them that come nigh me*, Levit. x. 3. And God then accounts himself sanctified in such persons, when they sanctify themselves. Nadab and Abihu were a dreadful exposition of this text.

And for what concerns ourselves; he that shall thoroughly consider what the heart of man is, what sin and the world is, and what it is to approve one's self to an all-searching eye, in so sublime a duty as the sacrament, must acknowledge that a man may as well go about it without a *soul*, as without *preparation*.

For the holiest man living, by conversing with the world, insensibly draws something of

Serm. 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 283

of soil and taint from it: The very air and mien, the way and business of the world still (as it were) rubbing something upon the soul, which must be fetched off again, before it can be able heartily to converse with God. Many secret indispositions, coldnesses and aversions to duty, will undiscernibly steal upon it; and it will require both time, and close application of mind, to recover it to such a frame, as shall dispose and fit it for the spiritualities of religion.

And such as have made trial, find it neither so easy, nor so ready a passage from the noise, the din, and hurry of business, to the retirements of devotion, from the *Exchange* to the cloister, and from the freedoms of conversation, to the recollections and disciplines of the spirit.

The *Jews*, as soon as they came from markets, or any other such promiscuous resorts, would be sure to use accurate, and more than ordinary washings. And had their washings soak'd through the body, into the soul; and had not their inside reproached their outside, I see nothing in this custom, but what was allowable enough, and (in a people which needed *washing* so much) very commendable. Nevertheless, whatsoever it might have in it peculiar to the genius of that nation, the spiritual
use

284 *Of a worthy Preparation* Sermon. 8.

use and improvement of it, I am sure, may very well reach the best of us. So that if the *Jews* thought this practice requisite before they sat down to their own tables, let us christians think it absolutely necessary, when we come to God's table, *not to eat till we have washed*. And when I have said so, I suppose I need not add, that our *washing* is to be like our *eating*, both of them spiritual; that we are to carry it from the hand to the heart, to improve a ceremonial nicety into a substantial duty, and the modes of civility into the realities of religion.

And thus much for the first thing, *That a preparation in general is necessary*. But then, 2. The other thing imported in the proposition, *That every preparation is not sufficient*. It must be a suitable preparation; none but a *wedding garment* will serve the turn; a garment, as much fitted to the solemnity, as to the body itself, that wears it.

Now, all fitness lies in a particular commensuration, or proportion of one thing to another; and, that such an one as is founded in the very nature of things themselves, and not in the opinions of men concerning them. And for this cause it is, that the soul, no less than the body, must have its several distinct postures, and dispositions, fitting it for several distinct

Serm.8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 285

distinct offices, and performances. And, as no man comes with folded arms to fight or wrestle, nor prepares himself for the battle, as he would compose himself to sleep; so, upon a true estimate of things, it will be found every whit as absurd and irrational, for a man to discharge the most extraordinary duty of his religion, at the rate of an ordinary devotion. For, this is really a paradox in practice, and men may sometimes *do*, as well as *speak* contradictions.

There is a great festival now drawing on; a festival, designed chiefly for the acts of a joyful piety, but generally made only an occasion of bravery. I shall say no more of it at present, but this; that God expects from men something more than ordinary at such times, and that it were much to be wished, for the credit of their religion, as well as the satisfaction of their consciences, that their *Easter* devotions would, in some measure, come up to their *Easter* dress.

Now, that our *Preparation* may answer the important work and duty which we are to engage in, these two conditions, or qualifications, are required in it.

1. That it be *habitual*.
2. That it be also *actual*.

For,

286 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8

For, it is certain, that there may both be acts, which proceed not from any pre-existing habits; and, on the other side, habits, which lie for a time dormant, and do not at all exert themselves in action. But, in the case now before us, there must be conjunction of both; and one without the other can never be *effectual* for that purpose, for which both together are but *sufficient*. And,

First, For habitual Preparation. This consists in a standing permanent habit or principle of holiness, wrought chiefly by God's spirit, and instrumentally by his Word, in the heart or soul of man: Such a Principle, as is called, both by our Saviour, and his apostles, the *new birth*, the *new man*, the *immortal seed*, and the like; and, by which a man is so universally changed, and transformed in the whole frame and temper of his soul, as to have a new judgment, and sense of things, new desires, new appetites, and inclinations.

And this is first produced in him, by that mighty spiritual change, which we call *Conversion*. Which being so rarely and seldom found in the hearts of men, (even where it is most pretended to) is but too full, and sad a demonstration of the truth of that terrible saying; *That few are chosen; and consequently, but few saved.* For, who almost is there, of whom

Serm. 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 287

whom we can with any rational *assurance*, or perhaps so much as *likelihood*, affirm, Here is a man, whose nature is renewed, whose heart is changed, and the stream of whose appetites is so turned, that he does with as high, and quick a relish, taste the ways of duty, holiness, and strict living, as others, or as he himself before this, gasped at the most enamouring proposals of sin? Who almost (I say) is there, who can reach and verify the height of this character? and yet, without which, the scripture absolutely affirms, *That a man cannot see the kingdom of God*, John iii. 3. For let preachers say and suggest what they will, *men will do as they use to do*; and *custom* generally is too hard for *conscience*, in spite of all its convictions. Possibly sometimes in hearing or reading the word, the conscience may be alarmed, the affections warmed, good desires begin to kindle, and to form themselves into some degrees of resolution; but the heart remaining all the time unchanged, as soon as men slide into the common course and converse of the world, all those resolutions and convictions quickly cool and languish, and after a few days are dismissed as troublesome companions. But assuredly, no man was ever made a true convert, or a *new creature*, at so easy a rate; sin was never dispossessed, nor holiness introduced by such feeble,

288 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

ble, vanishing impressions. Nothing under a thorough change will suffice; neither tears, nor trouble of mind, neither good desires, nor intentions, nor yet the relinquishment of some sins, nor the performance of some good works will avail any thing, *but a new creature*: A word that comprehends more in it, than words can well express; and, perhaps, after all that can be said of it, never thoroughly to be understood by what a man *bears* from others, but by what he must *feel* within himself.

And now, that this is required as the groundwork of all our preparations for the sacrament, is evident from hence; because this sacrament is not first designed to *make* us holy, but rather *supposes* us to be so; it is not a *converting*, but a *confirming* ordinance. It is properly our *spiritual food*: And, as all *food* pre-supposes a *principle of life* in him who receives it, which life is, by this means, to be continued and supported; so the sacrament of the *Lord's supper* is originally intended to preserve and maintain that *spiritual life*, which we do or should receive in baptism, or at least by a thorough conversion after it. Upon which account, according to the true nature and intent of this sacrament, men should not expect *life*, but *growth* from it: And see, that there be something to be fed, before they seek out for provision. For the

Serm.8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 289.

the truth is, for any one who is not passed from *death to life*, and has not in him that *new living principle*, which we have been hitherto speaking of, to come to this spiritual repast, is, upon the matter, as absurd and preposterous, as if he who makes a feast, should send to the graves and the church-yards for guests, or entertain and treat a corpse at a banquet.

Let men therefore consider, before they come hither, whether they have any thing besides *the name* they received in baptism, to prove their christianity by. Let them consider, whether, as by their baptism, they formerly washed away their original guilt, so they have not since, by their actual sins, washed away their baptism. And, if so, whether the *converting grace* of God has set them upon their legs again, by forming in them a *new nature*: And that such an one, as exerts and shews itself by the sure, infallible effects of a good life: Such an one as enables them to reject and trample upon all the alluring offers of the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*, so as not to be conquered, or enslaved by them; and, to chuse the hard and rugged paths of duty, rather than the easy and voluptuous ways of sin: Which every christian, by the very nature of his religion, as well as by his baptismal vow, is strictly obliged to do. And, if upon an impartial survey of them-

VOL. II. U selves,

290 *Of a worthy Preparation* Sermon. 8.

selves, men find that no such change has passed upon them, either let them prove, that they may be christians upon easier terms, or have a care how they intrude upon so great, and holy an ordinance, in which God is so seldom *mocked*, but it is to the mocker's confusion. And thus much for *habitual preparation*. But,

2. Over and above this, there is required also an *actual preparation*; which is (as it were) the furbishing or rubbing up of the former habitual principle.

We have both of them excellently described in *Matth. xxv.* in the parable of the *ten virgins*; of which, the *five wise* are said to have had *oil in their lamps*; yet, notwithstanding that, *mid-night* and weariness was too hard for them, and they all slumber'd and slept, and their lamps cast but a dim and a feeble light till the *bridegroom's approach*; but then, upon the first alarm of that, they quickly *rose, and trimmed their lamps*, and without either *trimming* or *painting* themselves (being as much *too wise*, as some should be *too old* for such follies) they presently put themselves into a readiness to receive their surprizing guest. Where, by their *having oil in their lamps*, no doubt, must be understood a principle of grace infused into their hearts, or the new nature formed within them; and, by their *trimming their lamps*, must

Serm. 8. *to the holy Sacrament.* 291

must be meant their actual exercise, and improvement of that standing principle in the particular instances of duty, suitable, and appropriate to the grand solemnity of the bridegroom's reception. In like manner, when a man comes to this sacrament, it is not enough that he has an habitual stock of grace, that he has the *immortal seed* of a living faith sown in his heart: This indeed is necessary, but not sufficient; his faith must be, not only *living* but *lively* too; it must be brightned and stirr'd up, and (as it were) put into a posture by a particular exercise of those several virtues, that are specifically requisite to a due performance of this duty: *Habitual grace* is the life, and *actual grace* the beauty and ornament of the soul. And therefore, let people in this high and great concern be but so just to their souls, as, in one much less, they never fail to be to their bodies; in which the greatest advantages of natural beauty make none think the farther advantage of a decent *dress* superfluous.

Nor is it at all strange, if we look into the reason of things, that a man habitually good and pious, should, at some certain turns, and times of his life, be at a loss how to exert the highest acts of that habitual principle. For, no creature *is perfect and pure act*; especially

292 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

a creature so compounded of soul and body, that body seems much the stronger part in the composition.

Common experience shews, that the wisest of men are not always fit and disposed to act wisely, nor the most admired speakers to speak eloquently, and exactly. They have indeed an acquired, standing ability of wisdom and eloquence within them, which gives them an habitual sufficiency for such performances. But, for all that, if the deepest states-man should presume to go to a council immediately from his cups, or the *ablest preacher* think himself fitted to preach, only by stepping up to the pulpit; notwithstanding the policy of the one, and the eloquence of the other, they may chance to get the just character of *bold fools* for venturing, whatsoever *good fortune* may bring them off.

And therefore, the most active powers and faculties of the mind require something beside themselves to raise them to the full height of their natural activity: Something to excite, and quicken, and draw them forth into immediate action. And this holds proportionably in all things animate or inanimate, in the world. The bare nature, and essential form of fire, will enable it to burn; but there must be an enlivening breath of air besides, to make it

Serm.8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 293

it flame. A man has the same strength, sleeping and waking; but while he sleeps, it fits him no more for business, than if he had none. Nor is it the having of wheels, and springs, though never so curiously wrought, and artificially set, but the winding of them up, that must give motion to the watch. And it would be endless to illustrate this subject by all the various instances that art and nature could supply us with.

But the case is much the same in spirituals. For, grace in the soul, while the soul is in the body, will always have the ill-neighbourhood of some remainders of corruption; which, though they do not conquer, and extinguish, yet will be sure to slacken, and allay the vigor and briskness of the renewed principle; so that when this principle is to engage in any great duty, it will need the actual intention, the particular stress and application of the whole soul, to disencumber, and set it free, to scour off its rust, and remove those hindrances, which would otherwise clog and check the freedom of its operations.

And thus having shewn, that to fit us for a due access to the holy sacrament, we must add *actual* preparation to *habitual*, I shall now endeavour to shew the several parts or ingredi-

294 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

ents, of which this actual preparation must consist.

And here I shall not *pretend* to give an account of every particular duty that may be useful for this purpose, but shall only mention some of the principal, and such as may most peculiarly contribute towards it: As,

First, Let a man apply himself to the great and difficult work of *self-examination* by a strict scrutiny into, and survey of the whole state of his soul; according to that known and excellent rule of the apostle, in the very case now before us; 1 Cor. xi. 28. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, &c.* If a man would have such a *wedding-garment* as may fit him exactly, let self-examination take the *measure*. A duty of so mighty an influence upon all that concerns the soul, that it is indeed the very root and ground-work of all true repentance, and the necessary *antecedent*, if not also the direct *cause* of a sinner's return to God.

For, as there are some sins which require a particular, and distinct repentance by themselves, and cannot be accounted for in the general heap of sins, *known* and *unknown*; so, how is it possible for a man to repent rightly of such sins, unless by a thorough search into the nature, number, and distinguishing circumstances

Serm.8. *to the holy Sacrament.* 295

stances of them, he comes to see how, and in what degree, they *are* to be repented of!

But the sovereign excellency and necessity of this duty needs no other nor greater proof of it, than this one consideration, that nothing in nature can be more grievous and offensive to a sinner, than to look into himself; and generally what grace requires, nature is most averse to. It is indeed as offensive as to rake into a dunghil; as grievous, as for one to read over his debts, when he is not able to pay them; or for a bankrupt to examine and look into his accounts, which, at the same time that they *acquaint*, must needs also *upbraid* him with his condition.

But as irksome as the work is, it is absolutely necessary. Nothing can well be imagined more painful, than to probe and search a purulent old sore to the bottom; but for all that, the pain must be endured, or no cure expected. And men certainly have sunk their reason to very gross, low, and absurd conceptions of God, when in the matter of sin they can make such false and short reckonings with him and their own hearts; for can they imagine, that God has therefore forgot their sins, because they are not willing to remember them? Or will they measure his *pardon* by their own *oblivion*? What pitiful fig-leaves, what senseless

296 *Of a worthy Preparation* Sermon. 8.

and ridiculous shifts are these, not able to *silence*, and much less *satisfy* an accusing conscience?

But now, for the better management of this examination of our past lives, we must thoroughly canvass them with these and the like questions.

As for instance; Let a man inquire what sins he has committed, and what breaches he has made upon those two great standing rules of duty, the *decalogue*, and our *Saviour's* divine sermon upon the mount. Let him inquire also what particular aggravations lie upon his sins, as whether they have not been committed against strong reluctance and light of conscience, after many winning calls of mercy to reclaim, and many terrible warnings of judgment to affright him? Whether resolutions, vows and protestations have not been made against them? Whether they have not been repeated frequently, and persisted in obstinately? And, lastly, Whether the same appetites to sin have not remained as active and unmortified after sacraments, as ever they had been before?

How important these considerations, and heads of enquiry are, all, who understand any thing, will easily perceive. For this we must know, that the very same sin, as to the nature of
of

of it, stamp'd with any one of these aggravations, is, in effect, not the same. And, he who has finned the same great sin after several times receiving the Sacrament, must not think that God will accept him under ten times greater repentance, and contrition for it, than he brought with him to that duty formerly. Whether God by his Grace will enable him to rise up to such a pitch, or no, is uncertain; but most certain, that both his work is harder, and his danger greater, than it was, or could be at the first.

Secondly, When a man has, by such a close and rigorous examination of himself, found out the *accursed thing*, and discovered his *sin*; the next thing in order must be, to work up his heart to the utmost hatred of it, and the bitterest sorrow and remorse for it. For, *self-examination* having first presented it to the thoughts, these naturally transmit, and hand it over to the passions. And this introduces the next ingredient of our sacramental preparations, to wit, *repentance*. Which arduous work I will suppose not now to *begin*, but to be *renewed*; and that with special reference to sins not repented of before, and yet more especially to those new scores which we still run ourselves upon, since the last preceding sacrament. Which method, faithfully and constantly

298 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

stantly observed, must needs have an admirable and mighty effect upon the conscience, and keep a man from breaking or running behind-hand in his spiritual estate, which, without frequent accountings, he will hardly be able to prevent.

But because this is a duty of such high consequence, I would by all means warn men of one very common, and yet very dangerous mistake about it; and that is, the taking of mere *sorrow for sin*, for *repentance*. It is indeed a good introduction to it; but the porch, though never so fair and spacious, is not the house itself. Nothing passes in the accounts of God for repentance, but change of life: *Ceasing to do evil, and doing good*, are the two great integral parts that complete this duty. *For not to do evil*, is much better than the sharpest sorrow *for having done it*; and *to do good*, is better, and more valuable than both.

When a man has found out *sin* in his actions, let him resolutely arrest it there; but let him also pursue it home to his inclinations, and dislodge it thence, otherwise it will be all to little purpose; for the root being still left behind, it is odds but in time it will shoot out again.

Men befool themselves infinitely, when by venting a few sighs or groans, putting the finger in the eye, and whimpering out a few melancholy

Serm.8. *to the holy Sacrament.* 299

lancholy words; and lastly, concluding all with, *I wish I had never done so; and I am resolved never to do so more*; they will needs persuade themselves, that they have repented; though, perhaps, in this very thing, their heart all the while deceives them, and they neither really *wish* the one, nor resolve the other.

But whether they do, or no, all true, penitential sorrow will, and must proceed much farther. It must force, and make its way into the very inmost corners, and recesses of the soul; it must shake all the powers of sin, producing in the heart strong and lasting averfions to evil, and equal dispositions to good, which, I must confess, are great things; but if the sorrow which we have been speaking of, carries us not so far, let it express it self never so loudly, and passionately, and discharge it self in never so many showers of tears, and volleys of sighs; yet, by all this, it will no more purge a man's heart, than the washing of his hands can cleanse the rottenness of his bones. But,

Thirdly, When *self-examination* has both shewn us our sin, and *repentance* has disowned and cast it out, the next thing naturally consequent upon this, is with the highest importunity to supplicate God's *pardon* for the guilt, and his *grace* against the power of it: And this brings in *prayer* as the third preparative
for

300 *Of a worthy Preparation* Sermon.8.

for the sacrament. A duty upon which all the blessings of both worlds are entailed. A duty, appointed by God himself, as the great conduit, and noble instrument of commerce between heaven and earth. A duty, founded on man's essential dependance upon God, and so, in the ground and reason of it, perpetual, and consequently, in the practice of it, indispensable.

But I shall speak of it now only with reference to the sacrament. And so, whatsoever other graces may furnish us with a *wedding-garment*, it is certain that *prayer* must put it on. *Prayer* is that, by which a man engages all the auxiliaries of omnipotence it self against his sin; and is so utterly contrary to, and inconsistent with it, that the same heart cannot long hold them both, but one must soon quit possession of it to the other; and, either praying make a man leave off sinning, or sinning force him to give over praying.

Every real act of hatred of sin, is, in the very nature of the thing, a partial mortification of it; and, it is hardly possible for a man to pray heartily against his sin, but he must at the same time hate it too. I know a Man may think that he hates his sin, when indeed he does not; but then it is also as true, that he does not sincerely pray against it, whatsoever he may imagine.

Besides,

Serm. 8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 301

Besides, since the very life and spirit of *prayer* consists in an ardent, vehement desire of the thing prayed for; and since the nature of the soul is such, that it strangely symbolizes with the thing it mightily desires; it is evident, that if a man would have a devout, humble, sin-aborring, self-denying frame of spirit, he cannot take a more efficacious course to attain it, than by praying himself into it. And so close a connexion has this duty with the sacrament, that whatsoever we receive in the sacrament, is properly in answer to our prayers. And consequently, we may with great assurance conclude, that he who is not frequently *upon his knees*, before he comes to that holy table, *kneels* to very little purpose when he is there. But then,

Fourthly, Because *prayer* is not only one of the highest, and hardest duties in itself, but ought to be more than ordinarily fervent and vigorous before the sacrament; let the *body* be also called in, as an assistant to the *soul*, and *abstinence* and *fasting* added to promote and heighten her devotions. *Prayer* is a kind of *wrestling with God*; and, he who would win the prize at that exercise, must be severely *dieted* for that purpose.

The truth is, *fasting* was ever acknowledg'd by the church in all ages, as a singular instrument

302 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

ment of religion, and a particular preparative to the sacrament. And hardly was there ever any thing great, or heroick, either done or attempted in religion, without it. Thus, when *Moses received the law from God, it was with fasting*, Deut. ix. 9. When *Christ* entered upon the great office of his mediatorship, it was with *fasting*, *Matth.* iv. 2. And when *Paul* and *Barnabas* were separated to that high and difficult charge of preaching to the *Gentiles*, *Acts* xiii. 2. still it was managed with *fasting*. And, we know, the rubrick of our own church always, almost, enjoyns a *fast* to prepare us for a *festival*.

Bodily abstinence is certainly a great help to the *spirit*, and the experience of all wise and good men has ever found it so. The ways of nature, and the methods of grace are vastly different. Good men themselves are never so surprized, as in the midst of their jollities; nor so fatally over-taken, and caught, as when their *table is made the snare*. Even our first parents ate themselves out of paradise; and *Job's children* junketed and feasted together often, but the reckoning cost them dear at last. The *heart of the wise* (says *Solomon*) is in the house of mourning, and the house of *fasting* adjoins to it.

In a word, *fasting* is the diet of angels, the food and refection of souls, and the richest and highest

Serm. 8. to the holy Sacrament. 303

highest aliment of grace. And, he who fasts for the sake of religion, *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*, without a metaphor.

Fifthly, Since every devout prayer is designed to ascend, and *fly up* to heaven; as *fasting* (according to St. *Austin's* allusion) has given it *one wing*, so let *alms-giving* to the poor supply it with another. And both these together, will not only carry it up triumphant to heaven, but, if need require, bring heaven itself down to the devout person who sends it thither: As, while *Cornelius* was *fasting* and *praying*, (to which he still joyned *giving alms*) an angel from heaven was dispatched to him with this happy message, *Acts* x. 4. *Thy prayers, and thine alms, are come up for a memorial before God*. And nothing, certainly, can give a greater efficacy to *prayer*, and a more peculiar fitness for the *sacrament*, than an hearty and conscientious practice of this duty; without which all that has been mentioned hitherto is nothing but wind and air, pageantry and hypocrisy: For, if there be any truer measure of a man, than *by what he does*; it must be, *by what he gives*. He, who is truly pious, will account it a *wedding-supper* to feed the hungry, and a *wedding-garment* to cloath the naked. And, God and man will find it a very unfit *garment* for such a purpose, which has not in it a *purse*, or *pocket* for the poor.

But,

304 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

But, so far are some from *considering the poor* before the sacrament, that they have been observed to give nothing to the poor, even at the sacrament: And tho' such, that if rich cloaths might pass for a *wedding-garment*, none could appear before fitted for such a solemnity than themselves; yet some such, I say, I myself have seen at a communion, drop nothing into the poor's bason.

But, good God! What is the heart of such worldlings made of, and what a mind do they bring with them to so holy an ordinance! an ordinance, in which none can be qualified to *receive*, whose heart does not serve them also to *give*.

From such indeed as have nothing, God expects nothing; but, where God has given (as I may say) with both hands, and men return with none, such must know, that the poor have an *action of debt* against them, and that God himself will undertake, and prosecute their suit for them; and if he does, since they could not find in their hearts to proportion *their charity to their estates*, nothing can be more just, than for God to proportion *their estates to their charity*; and, by so doing, he cannot well give them a shrewder, and a shorter cut.

In

Serm.8. to the Holy Sacrament. 305

In the mean time, let such know further that whosoever dares, upon so sacred, and solemn an occasion, approach the altar, with bowels so shut up, as to leave nothing behind him there for the poor, shall be sure to carry *something* away with him from thence, *which* will do him but little good.

Sixthly, Since the *charity* of the *hand* signifies but little, unless it springs from the *heart*, and flows through the *mouth*, let the pious communicant, both in *heart* and *tongue*, *thoughts* and *speech*, put on a charitable, friendly, christian temper of mind, and carriage towards all. *Wrath* and *envy*, *malice* and *back-biting*, and the like, are direct contradictions to the very spirit of christianity, and fit a man for the sacrament, just as much as a stomach overflowed with gall would help him to digest his meat. St. *Paul* often rebukes and schools such disturbers of the world very sharply, correcting a base humour by a very generous rule, *Phil. ii. 3. Let each* (says he) *esteem others better than themselves.* No man, doubtless, shall ever be condemned of God for *not judging* his brother: For be thy brother or neighbour never so wicked and ungodly, satisfy thy self with this, that another's wickedness shall never damn thee; but thy own bitterness, and rancour may; and, continued in, certainly will. Rather let this

306 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm.8.

want of grace give thee occasion to exercise thine, (if thou hast any) in thinking and speaking better of him, than he deserves: And, if thy *charity* proves *mistaken*, assure thyself, that God will accept the *charity*, and overlook the *mistake*. But if in judging him whom thou hast nothing to do with, thou chancest to judge one way, and God and truth to judge another, take heed of that dreadful tribunal, where it will not be enough to say, that *I thought this*, or *I heard that*; and, where no man's mistake will be able to warrant an unjust surmise, and much less justify a false censure. Such would find it much better for them to retreat inwards, and view themselves in the law of God and their own consciences; and, that will tell them *their own* impartially, that will fetch off all their *paint*, and shew them a *foul face* in a *true glass*. Let them read over their catechism, and lay aside *spight* and *virulence*, *gossipping* and *meddling*, *calumny* and *detraction*; and let not all about them be villains and reprobates, because they themselves are envious and forlorn, idle and malicious: Such vermin are to be look'd upon by all sober christians, as the very cankers of society, and the shame of any religion; and so far from being fit to come to the sacrament, that really they are not fit to come to church; and would much better

Serm.8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 307

better become the *house of correction*, than the *house of prayer*.

Nevertheless, as custom in sin makes people *blind*, and blindness makes them *bold*, none come more confidently to the sacrament than such wretches. But when I consider the pure and blessed body of our Saviour passing through the *open sepulchres of such throats*, into the noisome receptacles of their boiling, fermenting breasts, it seems to me a lively, but sad representation of Christ's being *first buried, and then descending into hell*. Let this diabolical leaven therefore be purged out; and, while such pretend to be so busy in cleansing their *hearts*, let them not forget to wash their *mouths* too.

Seventhly and lastly, As it is to be supposed, that the pious communicant has all along carried on, so let him likewise, in the issue, close his preparatory work with reading and meditation. Of which, since the time will not serve me to speak more now, I shall only remark this, that they are duties of so near an import to the well-being of the soul, that the proper office of reading is, to *take* in its spiritual food, and of meditation, to *digest* it.

And now, I hope, that whosoever shall in the sincerity of his heart acquit himself as to all the foregoing duties, and thereby prepare

308 *Of a worthy Preparation* Serm. 8.

and adorn himself to meet and converse with his Saviour at this divine feast, shall never be accosted with the thunder of that dreadful increpation from him, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment?*

But, because I am very sensible, that all the particular instances of duty, which may one way or other contribute to the fitting of men for this *great one*, can hardly be assigned, and much less equally and universally applied, where the conditions of men are so different, I shall gather them all into this one plain, full, and comprehensive rule; namely, *that all those duties which common christianity always obliges a christian to, ought most eminently, and with an higher and more exalted pitch of devotion, to be performed by him before the sacrament; and convertibly, whatsoever duties divines prescribe to be observed by him with a peculiar fervour, and application of mind, upon this occasion, ought, in their proportion, to be practised by him, through the whole course of his christian conversation.*

And this is a *solid and sure rule*. A rule, that will never deceive or lurch the sincere communicant. A rule, that by adding *discretion* to *devotion*, will both keep him from being humourfome, singular, and phantastick

in

Serm.8. *to the Holy Sacrament.* 309

in his preparations before the sacrament, and (which is worse, and must fatally unravel all again) from being, as most are, loose and remiss after it; and thinking, that as soon as the Sacrament is over, their great business is done, whereas indeed it is but begun.

And now I fear, that, as I have been too long upon the whole, so I have been but too brief upon so many, and those such weighty particulars. But I hope you will supply this defect, by enlarging upon them in your practice; and make up the omissions of the pulpit, by the meditations of the closet. And God direct and assist us all in so concerning a work!

*To whom be render'd and ascrib'd, as is
most due, all praise, might, majesty, and
dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.*

T

S

The Fatal Imposture, and Force of Words,

Set forth in a

S E R M O N

Preached on

I S A I A H v. 20.

May the 9th, 1686.

The Fort of the Republic, and Fort of Words

2nd Fort in a

ERMION

Printed on

12 N 1 A H 7. 20

May the 2nd, 1886

Ser

==

S

O

—

Wa

T

wi

ex

fen

pe

co

to

he

SERMON IX.

Of the fatal Imposture and Force of Words.

I S A. v. 20.

*Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and
Good Evil, &c.*

TH E S E words contain in them two things.

1. A *woe* denounced; and,
2. The *sin* for which it is denounced; to wit, *the calling evil good, and good evil*; which expression may be taken two ways.

First, In a *judicial*, and more restrained sense: As it signifies the pronouncing of a *guilty* person *innocent*, and an *innocent guilty*, in the course of judgment. But this I take to be too particular, to reach the design of the words here.

Secondly,

Secondly, It may be taken in a *general*, and more enlarged sense ; as it imports a misrepresentation of the qualities of things and actions, to the common apprehensions of men, abusing their minds with false notions ; and so by this artifice making *evil* pass for *good*, and *good* for *evil*, in all the great concerns of life. Where, by *good*, I question not, but *good* morally so called, *bonum honestum*, ought (chiefly at least) to be understood ; and that the good of *profit*, or *pleasure*, the *bonum utile* or *jucundum*, hardly come into any account here, as things extremely below the principal design of the spirit of God in this place.

It is wonderful to consider, that since *good* is the natural and proper object, which all human choice is carried out to ; and *evil* that, which, with all its might, it shuns, and flies from : and, since withal, there is that controuling worth and beauty in *goodness*, that, as such, the *will* cannot but like, and desire it ; and, on the other side, that odious deformity in vice, that it never so much as offers itself to the affections, or practice of mankind, but under the disguise and colours of the other : and since all this is easily discernible by the ordinary discourses of the understanding ; and lastly, since nothing passes into the choice of the will, but as it comes conveyed, and warranted

ranted by the understanding, as worthy of its choice; I say, it is wonderful to consider, that notwithstanding all this, the lives and practices of the generality of men (in which men certainly should be most in earnest) are almost wholly took up in a passionate pursuit of what is *evil*, and in an equal neglect, if not also an abhorrence, of what is *good*. This is certainly so; and experience, which is neither to be confuted, nor denied, does every minute prove the sad truth of this assertion.

But now, what shall be the cause of all this? For, so great, so constant, and so general a practice must needs have, not only a cause, but also a great, a constant, and a *general cause*; a *cause* every way commensurate to such an *effect*: And *this cause* must of necessity be from one of those two commanding powers of the soul, the *understanding*, or the *will*. As for the *will*, though its liberty be such, that a suitable, or proper *good* being proposed to it, it has a power to refuse, or not to chuse it; yet it has no power to chuse *evil*, considered absolutely as *evil*; this being directly against the nature, and natural method of its workings.

Nevertheless, it is but too manifest, that things *evil*, extremely *evil*, are both readily chosen, and eagerly pursued and practised by it. And therefore it must needs be from that other govern-

governing faculty of the soul, the *understanding*, which represents to the *will* things really *evil*, under the notion and character of *good*. And this, this is the true source and original of this great mischief. The *will* chuses, follows and embraces things evil and destructive; but it is, because the *understanding* first tells it, that they are *good, and wholesome, and fit to be chosen* by it. One man gives another a cup of poison, a thing as terrible as death; but, at the same time, he tells him, that it is a cordial, and so he drinks it off, and dies.

From the beginning of the world, to this day, there was never any great villainy acted by men, but it was in the strength of some great fallacy put upon their minds by a false representation of *evil* for *good*, or *good* for *evil*. In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die, says God to *Adam*; and so long as *Adam* believed this, he did not eat. But, says the devil, In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt be so far from *surely dying*, that thou shalt be immortal, and from a man, grow into an angel; and upon this different account of the thing, he presently took the fruit, and eat mortality, misery, and destruction to himself, and his whole posterity.

And now, can there be a *woe* or *curse* in all the stores and magazines of vengeance, equal
to

to the malignity of such a practice; of which one single instance could involve all mankind, past, present, and to come, in one universal and irreparable confusion? God commanded, and *told man what was good*, but the devil firnamed it *evil*, and thereby baffled the command, turned the world topsy-turvy, and brought a new chaos upon the whole creation.

But that I may give a more full discussion of the sense and design of the words, I shall do it under these following particulars: As,

First, I shall give you some general account of the nature of *good* and *evil*, and the reason upon which they are founded.

Secondly, I shall shew that the *way* by which *good* and *evil* commonly operate upon the mind of man, is by those respective *names* or *appellations* by which they are notified, and conveyed to the mind. And,

Thirdly and *lastly*, I shall shew the *mischief*, directly, naturally, and unavoidably following from the misapplication, and confusion of those names.

And, I hope, by going over all these particulars, you may receive some tolerable satisfaction about this great subject, which we have now before us.

I. And first for the *nature of good and evil*, what they are, and upon what they are founded.

318 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm. 9.

ed. The knowledge of this I look upon as the foundation and ground-work of all those rules, that either moral philosophy, or divinity, can give for the direction of the lives and practices of men; and consequently, ought to be reckoned as a first principle; and that such an one, that, for ought I see, the thorough *speculation* of good will be found much more difficult than the *practice*. But when we shall have once given some account of the nature of *good*, that of *evil* will be known by consequence; as being only a privation, or absence of *good*, in a subject capable of it, and proper for it.

Now, *good* in the general nature, and notion of it, over and above the bare *being* of a thing, connotes also a certain *suitableness* or *agreeableness* of it to some other thing: According to which *general notion* of good applied to the *particular nature* of moral goodness, (upon which only we now insist) a thing or action is said to be *morally good* or *evil*, as it is agreeable, or disagreeable, to *right reason*, or to a rational nature. And, as *right reason* is nothing else but the understanding, or mind of man, discoursing, and judging of things truly, and as they are in themselves; and as all *truth* is unchangeably the same (that proposition, which is true at any time, being so for ever); so it must

Serm. 9. *and Force of Words.* 319

must follow, that the *moral goodness or evil of men's actions*, which consist in their conformity, or inconformity to *right reason*, must be also eternal, necessary, and unchangeable. So that, as that, which is *right reason*, at any time, or in any case, is always *right reason* with relation to the same time, and case; in like manner, that which is morally *good*, or *evil* at any time, or in any case, (since it takes its whole measure from *right reason*) must be also eternally, and unchangeably, a *moral good or evil*, with relation to that time, and to that case. For propositions concerning the *goodness*, as well as concerning the *truth* of things, are *necessary and perpetual*.

But you will say, may not the same action, as for instance, *the killing of a man*, be sometimes morally good, and sometimes morally evil? To wit, *good* when it is the execution of justice upon a malefactor; and *evil*, when it is the taking away the life of an innocent person?

To this I answer: That this indeed is true of actions considered in their general nature or kind, but not considered in their particular, individual instances. For, generally speaking, to take away the life of a man, is neither morally *good*, nor morally *evil*, but capable of being either, as the circumstances of things shall determine it; but every particular act of
killing

killing is of necessity accompanied with, and determin'd by several circumstances, which actually and unavoidably constitute, and denominate it either *good* or *evil*. And that, which being performed under such and such circumstances, is *morally good*, cannot possibly, under the same circumstances, ever be *morally evil*: And so on the contrary.

From whence we infer the villainous falsehood of two assertions, held and maintained by some persons, and too much countenanced by some others in the world. As,

First, That *good* and *evil*, *honest* and *dishonest*, are not qualities existing or inherent in things themselves, but only founded in the opinions of men concerning things. So that any thing or action, that has gained the general approbation of any people, or society of men, ought, in respect of those persons, to be esteemed *morally good*, or *honest*; and, whatsoever falls under their general disapprobation, ought, upon the same account, to be reckoned *morally evil*, or *dishonest*; which also, they would seem to prove from the very signification of the word *honestus*; which, originally and strictly, signifies no more than *creditable*, and is but a derivative from *honor*, which signifies *credit* or *honour*; and according to the opinion of some, (we know) that is lodg'd only in the esteem
and

and thoughts of those who pay it, and not in the thing, or person, whom it is paid to. Thus, for example, *thieving*, or *robbing*, was accounted amongst the *Spartans* a gallant, worthy, and a creditable thing; and consequently, according to the principle which we have mentioned, *thievery*, amongst the *spartans*, was a practice morally good and *honest*. Thus also, both with the *Grecians*, and the *Romans*, it was held a magnanimous, and highly laudable act, for a man under any great or insuperable misery, or distress, to put an end to his own life; and accordingly, with those who had such thoughts of it, that, which we call self-murder, was properly a *good*, an *honest*, and a *virtuous* action. And, persons of the highest and most acknowledged probity and virtue amongst them; such as *Marcus Cato*, and *Pomponius Atticus*, actually did it, and stand celebrated both by their orators and historians, for so doing. And I could also instance in other actions of a fouler and more unnatural hue, which yet from the approbation and credit they have found in some countries and places, have passed for good morality in those places: But out of respect to common humanity, as well as divinity, I shall pass them over. And thus much for the first assertion, or opinion.

Secondly, The second opinion, or position, is, that *good* and *evil*, *honest* and *dishonest*, are

322 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm.9.

originally founded in the laws and constitutions of the sovereign civil power, enjoining some things or actions, and prohibiting others. So that when any thing is found conducing to the welfare of the publick, and thereupon comes to be enacted by governors into a law, it is forthwith thereby render'd *morally good* and *honest*; and, on the contrary, *evil* and *dishonest*, when upon its contrariety to the publick welfare, it stands prohibited and condemned by the same publick authority.

This was the opinion heretofore of *Epicurus*, as it is represented by *Gassendus*; who understood his notions too well, to mis-represent them: And lately of *one* amongst our selves, a less philosopher, though the greater heathen of the two, the infamous author of the *leviathan*. And the like lewd, scandalous, and immoral doctrine, or worse (if possible) may be found in some writers of another kind of note and character; whom, one would have thought, not only religion, but shame of the world might have taught better things.

Such as, for instance, *Bellarmino* himself, who in his 4th book and 5th chapter, *de pontifice Romano*, has this monstrous passage. "That
" *if the pope should through error or mistake*
" *command vices, and prohibit virtues, the*
" *church would be bound in conscience to believe*
" *vice*

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 323

“ *vice to be good, and virtue evil.* I shall give you the whole passage in his own words to a tittle: “ *Fides catholica docet omnem virtutem esse bonam, omne vitium esse malum. Si autem erraret papa, præcipiendo vitia vel prohibendo virtutes, teneretur ecclesia credere vitia esse bona & virtutes malas, nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare.* Good God! That any thing that wears the name of a *christian*, or but of a *man*, should venture to own such a villainous, impudent, and blasphemous assertion in the face of the world, as this! What! *must murther, adultery, theft, fraud, extortion, perjury, drunkenness, rebellion*, and the like, pass for good and commendable actions, and fit to be practised? And *mercy, chastity, justice, truth, temperance, loyalty, and sincere dealing*, be accounted things *utterly evil, immoral*, and not to be followed by men, in case the pope, who is generally weak, and almost always a wicked man, should, by his mistake, and *infallible ignorance*, command the former, and forbid the latter? Did Christ himself ever assume such a power, as to alter the morality of actions, and to transform vice into virtue, and virtue into vice by his bare word? Certainly never did a grosser paradox, or a wickeder sentence drop from the mouth or pen of any

324 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm.9.

mortal man, since reason or religion had any being in the world.

And, I must confess, I have often with great amazement wonder'd how it could possibly come from a person of so great a reputation both for learning and virtue too, as the world allows *Bellarmino* to have been. But when men give themselves over to the defence of wicked interests, and false propositions, it is just with God to smite the greatest abilities with the greatest infatuations.

But as for these two positions, or assertions, *that the moral good or evil, the honesty or dishonesty of human actions, should depend either upon the opinions or upon the laws of men*; they are certainly false in *themselves*, because they are infinitely absurd in *their consequences*. Some of which are such as these. As,

First, If the moral goodness, or evil of mens actions were originally founded in, and so proceeded wholly from the opinions, or laws of men, then it would follow, that they must change and vary according to the change and difference of the opinions and laws of men: And consequently, that the same action, under exactly the same circumstances, may be morally good *one day*, and morally evil *another*; and morally good in *one place*, and morally evil in *another*: Forasmuch as the same sovereign authority

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 325

thority may enact or make a law, commanding such or such an action to day, and a quite contrary law forbidding the same action to morrow; and the very same action, under the same circumstances, may be commanded by law in *one country*, and prohibited by law in *another*. Which being so, the consequence is manifest, and the absurdity of the consequent intolerable.

Secondly, If the moral *goodness*, or *evil* of mens actions, depended originally upon human laws, then those laws themselves could neither be morally good nor evil: The consequence is evident, because those laws are not commanded, or prohibited by any *antecedent* human laws: And consequently, if the moral goodness, or evil of any act were to be derived only from a *precedent* human law, laws themselves not supposing a dependence upon other *precedent* human laws, could have no *moral goodness* or *evil* in them. Which to assert of any human act, (such as all human laws essentially are, and must be) is certainly a very gross absurdity.

Thirdly, If the moral goodness, or evil of mens actions were sufficiently derived from human laws, or constitutions; then upon supposal that a *divine law* should (as it often does) command what is prohibited by human laws, and prohibit what is commanded by them, it would follow, that either such commands and

prohibitions of the divine law do not at all affect the actions of men in point of their morality, so as to render them either good or evil, or, that the same action, at the same time, may, in respect of the divine law commanding it, be *morally good*; and, in respect of a human law forbidding it, be *morally evil*. Than which consequence nothing can be more clear, nor withal more absurd.

And many more of the like nature, I could easily draw forth, and lay before you: Every false principle or proposition being sure to be attended with a numerous train of absurdities.

But, as to the subject-matter now in hand; so far is the morality of *human* actions, as to the goodness or evil of them, from being founded in any human law, that in very many, and those the principal instances of human *action*, it is not originally founded in, or derived from so much as any *positive divine* law. There being a *jus naturale* certainly antecedent to all *jus positivum*, either human or divine; and that such, as results from the very nature and being of things, as they stand in such a certain habitude, or relation to one another: To which relation, whatsoever is done agreeably, is morally and essentially *good*; and, whatsoever is done otherwise, is, at the same rate, *morally evil*.

And

And this I shall exemplify in those two grand comprehensive, moral duties, which man is for ever obliged to, *his duty towards God, and his duty towards his neighbour.*

And first, for his duty towards God; which is, *To love and obey him with all his heart, and all his soul.* It is certain that for a rational, intelligent creature to conform himself to the will of God in all things, carries in it a moral rectitude, or goodness; and to disobey or oppose his will in any thing, imports a moral obliquity, before God ever deals forth any particular law, or command to such a creature: There being a general obligation upon man to obey all God's laws, *whenever they shall be declared*, before any particular instance of law comes actually to be declared. But now whence is this? Why, from that *essential suitableness*, which obedience has to the relation which is between a rational creature, and his Creator. Nothing in nature being more irrational, and irregular, and consequently more immoral, than for an intelligent being to oppose, or disobey that sovereign, supreme *will*, which gave him that being, and has withal the sole and absolute disposal of him in all his concerns. So that there needs no positive law, or sanction of God to stamp an obliquity upon such a disobedience; since it cleaves to it essentially, and by way of natural result

328 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm.9.

from it, upon the account of that utter unsuitableness which disobedience has to the relation which man naturally and necessarily stands in towards his Maker.

And then, in the next place, for his *duty to his neighbour*: The whole of which is comprized in that great rule, *of doing as a man would be done by*. We may truly affirm, that the *morality of this rule* does not originally derive itself from those words of our Saviour, *Mat. vii. 12. Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them*: No, nor yet from *Moses* or the prophets; but it is as old as *Adam*, and bears date with human nature itself; as springing from that primitive relation of *equality*, which all men, as *fellow creatures* and *fellow subjects* to the same supreme Lord, bear to one another, in respect of that common right which every man has *equally* to his life, and to the proper comforts of life; and consequently, to all things naturally necessary to the support of both.

Now, whatsoever one man has a right to keep or possess, no other man can have a right to take from him. So that no man has a right to expect that *from*, or to do that *to* another, which that other has not an equal right to expect from, and to do to him. Which *parity of right*, as to all things purely natural, being undoubt-

undoubtedly the result of nature itself, can any thing be inferred from thence more conformable to reason, and consequently of a greater moral rectitude, than that such an *equality of right* should also cause an *equality of behaviour* between man and man, as to all those mutual offices and intercourses, in which life, and the happiness of life are concerned? Nothing certainly can shine out, and shew itself by the mere light of reason, as an higher and more unquestionable piece of morality than *this*, nor as a more confessed deviation from morality than the contrary practice.

From all which discourse, I think we may, without presumption, conclude, that the *rationis boni & mali; the nature of good and evil*, as to the principal instances of both, spring from that essential habitude or relation, which the nature of one thing bears to another by virtue of that order which they stand placed in here in the world, by the very law and condition of their creation; and, for that reason, do and must precede all positive laws, sanctions, or institutions whatsoever. *Good and evil* are in morality, as the *east and west* are in the frame of the world; *founded in*, and *divided* by that fixt and unalterable situation, which they have respectively in the whole body of the universe: Or, as the *right hand* is discriminated from the
left,

left, by a natural, necessary, and never-to-be confounded distinction.

And thus I have done with the *first thing* proposed, and given you such an account of the *nature of good and evil*, as the measure of the present exercise and occasion would allow. Pass we now to the

2. Which is to shew, that the way by which *good and evil* generally *operate upon the mind of man*, is by those words or names by which they are notified and conveyed to the mind. Words are the signs and symbols of things; and, as in accounts, cyphers and figures pass for real sums; so in the course of human affairs, words and names pass for things themselves. For things, or objects, cannot enter into the *mind*, as they subsist in themselves, and by their own natural bulk pass into the apprehension; but they are taken in by their *ideas*, their *notions* or *resemblances*; which imprinting themselves after a *spiritual, immaterial manner*, in the imagination; and from thence under a farther *refinement*, passing into the intellect, are by that expressed by certain words or names found out and invented by the mind, for the communication of its conceptions or thoughts to others. So that as *conceptions* are the images or resemblances of things to the mind within itself; in like manner are words or names the marks, tokens

kens or resemblances of those conceptions to the minds of them whom we converse with: τα' ἐν τῇ φωνῇ ἢ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα, being the known maxim laid down by the philosopher, as the first and most fundamental rule of all discourse.

This therefore is certain, that in human life, or conversation, *words* stand for *things*; the common business of the world not being capable of being managed otherwise: For by these, men come to know one another's minds: By these, they covenant and confederate: By these, they buy and sell, they deal and traffick. In short, words are the great instruments both of *practice* and *design*; which for the most part, move wholly in the strength of them. Forasmuch as it is the nature of man both to *will* and to *do*, according to the persuasion he has of the *good* and *evil* of those things that come before him; and to take up his persuasions according to the representations made to him of those qualities, by their respective names, or appellations.

This is the true and natural account of this matter; and it is all that I shall remark upon this second head. I proceed now to the

3. Which is, to *shew the mischief which directly, naturally, and unavoidably follows from the misapplication and confusion of those names.*

And,

And, in order to this, I shall premise these two considerations.

I. That the generality of mankind is wholly and absolutely governed by *words* and names; *without*, nay, for the most part, even *against* the knowledge men have of things. The multitude, or common rout, like a drove of sheep, or an herd of oxen, may be managed by any noise, or cry, which their drivers shall accustom them to.

And, he who will set up for a skilful manager of the rabble, so long *as they have but ears to hear*, needs never enquire, whether they have any *understanding* whereby to judge; but with two or three popular, empty words, such as *popery and superstition, right of the subject, liberty of conscience, Lord Jesus Christ*, well tuned and humoured, may whistle them backwards and forwards, upwards and downwards, till he is weary; and get up upon their backs when he is so.

As for the *meaning* of the word itself, that may shift for itself; and, as for *the sense and reason of it*, that has little or nothing to do here; only let it sound full and round, and chime right to the humour which is at present agog, (just as a big, long, rattling name is said to command even adoration from a *Spaniard*) and, no doubt, with this powerful, senseless engine

Serm. 9. *and Force of Words.* 333

engine the *rabble-driver* shall be able to carry all before him, or to draw all after him, as he pleases. For a plausible insignificant word, in the mouth of an expert demagogue, is a dangerous and a dreadful weapon.

You know, when *Cæsar's* army mutinied, and grew troublesome, no argument from interest, or reason, could satisfy or appease them: But, as soon as he gave them the appellation of *quirites*, the tumult was immediately hush'd, and all were quiet and content, and took that *one word* in good payment for all. Such is the trivial flightiness and levity of most minds. And indeed, take any passion of the soul of man, while it is predominant, and afloat, and, just in the critical height of it, nick it with some *lucky*, or *unlucky* word, and you may as certainly over-rule it to your own purpose, as a spark of fire, falling upon gun-powder, will infallibly blow it up.

The truth is, he who shall duly consider these matters, will find that there is a certain *bewitchery*, or fascination in words, which makes them operate with a force beyond what we can naturally give an account of. For, would not a man think, ill deeds, and shrewd turns, should reach farther, and strike deeper than ill words? And yet many instances might be given, in which men have much more easily
pardoned

334 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm. 9.

pardoned ill things *done*, than ill things *said* against them: Such a peculiar rancour and venom do they leave behind them in mens minds, and so much more poysonously and incurably does the serpent bite with his *tongue*, than with his *teeth*.

Nor are men prevailed upon at this odd unaccountable rate, by bare words, only through a *defect* of knowledge; but sometimes also do they suffer themselves to be carried away with these *puffs of wind*, even *contrary* to knowledge and experience itself. For otherwise, how could men be brought to surrender up their reason, their interest, and their credit to flattery? Gross, fulsom, abusive flattery; indeed more abusive and reproachful, upon a true estimate of things and persons, than the rudest scoffs, and the sharpest invectives. Yet so it is, that though men know themselves utterly void of those qualities and perfections, which the impudent sycophant, at the same time, both ascribes to them, and in his sleeve laughs at them for believing; nay, though *they know* that the flatterer himself knows the falshood of his own flatteries, yet they swallow the fallacious morsel, love the impostor, and with both arms hug the abuse; and that to such a degree, that no offices of friendship, no real services shall be able to lie in the balance against those luscious

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 335

cious falshoods, which flattery shall feed the mind of a *fool in power* with; the *sweetness* of the one infinitely overcomes the *substance* of the other.

And therefore, you shall seldom see, that such an one cares to have men of worth, honesty, and veracity about him; for, such persons cannot fall down and worship stocks and stones, though they are placed never so high above them. But their *yea* is *yea*, and their *nay*, *nay*; and they cannot admire a *fox* for his sincerity, a *wolf* for his generosity, nor an *ass* for his wit and ingenuity; and therefore can never be acceptable to those whose whole credit, interest, and advantage lies in their not appearing to the world, what they are really in themselves. None are or can be welcome to such, but those who speak *paint* and *wash*; for that is the thing they *love*; and, no wonder, since it is the thing they *need*.

There is hardly any rank, order or degree of men, but more or less have been captivated and enslaved by words. It is a weakness, or rather a fate, which attends both high and low; the statesman, who holds the helm, as well as the peasant who holds the plough. So that if ever you find an *ignoramus* in place and power, and can have so little conscience, and so much confidence, as to tell him to his face, that he
has

336 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm. 9.

has a wit and an understanding above all the world beside; and * *That what his own reason cannot suggest to him, neither can the united reason of all mankind put together*; I dare undertake, that, as fulsome a dose as you give him, he shall readily take it down, and admit the commendation, though he cannot believe the thing: *Blanditiæ etiam cum excluduntur, placet*, says *Seneca*. Tell him, that no history or antiquity can match his policies and his conduct; and presently the sot (because he knows neither history, nor antiquity) shall begin to *measure himself by himself*, (which is the only sure way for him not to fall short) and so immediately amongst his *outward admirers*, and his *inward despisers*, vouched also by a *teste meipso*, he steps forth an exact politician; and, by a wonderful, and new way of arguing, proves himself *no fool*, because, forsooth, the sycophant, who tells him so, is an egregious knave.

But to give you yet a grosser instance of the force of words, and of the extreme vanity of man's nature in being influenced by them, hardly shall you meet with any person, man or woman, so aged, or ill-favoured, but if

* The words of a great self-opiniator, and a bitter reviler of the clergy.

you will venture to commend them for their comeliness; nay, and for their youth too, though *time out of mind* is wrote upon every line of their face; yet they shall take it very well at your hands, and begin to think with themselves, that certainly they have some perfections, which the generality of the world are not so happy as to be aware of.

But now, are not these (think we) strange self-delusions, and yet attested by common experience, almost every day? But whence, in the mean time, can all this proceed, but from that besotting intoxication, which this *verbal* magick (as I may so call it) brings upon the mind of man? For can any thing in nature have a more certain, deep, and undeniable effect, than folly has upon man's mind, and age upon his body? And yet we see, that in both these, words are able to persuade men out of what they *find* and *feel*, to reverse the very impressions of sense, and to amuse men with fancies and paradoxes, even in spite of nature and experience. But since it would be endless to pursue all the particulars in which this humour shews itself; whosoever would have one full, lively and complete view of an empty, shallow, self-opinionated grandee, surrounded by his flatterers, (like a choice dish of meat by a company of fellows *commending*, and de-

338 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm. 9.

vouring it at the same time) let him cast his eye upon *Abab* in the midst of his false prophets, 2 *Kings* xxii. Where we have them all with one voice for giving him a cast of their court-prophecy, and sending him, in a compliment, to be knockt on the head at *Ramoth Gilead*. But, says *Jehoshaphat*, (who smelt the parasite through the prophet) in the 7th verse, *Is there not a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him? Why yes, says Abab, there is yet one man by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. Ah! That was his crime; the poor man was so good a subject, and so bad a courtier, as to venture to serve, and save his prince, whether he would or no; for, it seems, to give Abab such warning as might infallibly have prevented his destruction, was esteemed by him evil, and to push him on head-long into it, because he was fond of it, was accounted good. These were his new measures of good and evil. And therefore, those who knew how to make their court better, (as the word is) tell him a bold lye in God's name, and therewith sent him packing to his certain doom; thus calling evil good at the cost of their prince's crown, and his life too. But what cared they? They knew that it would please, and that was enough for them; there*

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 339

there being always a sort of men in the world, (whom others have an interest to serve by) who had rather a great deal be *pleased*, than be *safe*. *Strike* them under the *fifth rib*, provided at the same time you *kiss* them too, as *Joab* served *Abner*, and you may both destroy and oblige them with the same blow.

Accordingly, in the xxxth of *Isaiab*, we find some arrived to that pitch of sottishness, and so much in love with their own ruin, as to own plainly and roundly what they would be at; in the 13th verse, *Prophecy not unto us, say they, right things, but prophecy to us smooth things*. As if they had said, do but oil the razor for us, and let us alone to cut our own throats. Such an enchantment is there in words; and so fine a thing does it seem to some, to be ruined plausibly, and to be ushered to their destruction with panegyrick and acclamation: A shameful, though irrefragable argument of the absurd empire and usurpation of words over things; and that the greatest affairs, and most important interests of the world, are carried on by things, not as they *are*, but as they are *called*.

And thus much for the first thing which I thought necessary to premise to the prosecution of our third particular.

2. The other thing to be premised, is this; that as the *generality of men* are wholly govern'd

340 *Of the fatal Imposture* Sermon.9.

by names and words; so there is nothing, in which they are so remarkably, and powerfully govern'd by them, as in matters of *good* and *evil*; so far as these qualities relate to, and affect the actions of men. A thing certainly of a most fatal and pernicious import. For, though in matters of *mere* speculation it is not much the concern of society, whether or no men proceed wholly upon *trust*, and take the bare word of others, for what they assent to, since it is not much material to the welfare either of government, or of themselves, whether they opine right or wrong, and whether they be philosophers, or no; yet it is vastly the concern both of government, and of themselves too, whether they be morally *good* or *bad*, *honest* or *dishonest*. And surely, it is hardly possible for men to make it their business to be *virtuous* or *honest*, while vices are called and pointed out to them by the *names* of virtues; and they all the while suppose the nature of things to be truly and faithfully signified by their names, and thereupon *believe* as they hear, and *practise* as they believe. And that this is the course of much the greater part of the world, thus to take up their persuasions concerning *good* and *evil* by an *implicit faith*, and a full acquiescence in the word of those, who shall represent things to them under these characters, I shall prove
by

by two reasons; and those such as (I fear) will not only be found reasons to evince that men actually do so; but also sad demonstrations to conclude that they are never like to do otherwise.

First, The first of which shall be taken from that similitude, neighbourhood and affinity, which is between *vice* and *virtue*, *good* and *evil*, in several notable instances of each. For, though the general natures, and definitions of these qualities are sufficiently distant from one another, and so in no danger of a promiscuous confusion; yet when they come to subsist in particulars, and to be cloathed, and attended with several accidents, and circumstances, the case is hereby much altered; for then, the discernment is neither so easie, nor yet so certain. Thus it is not always so obvious to distinguish between an act of liberality, and an act of prodigality; between an act of courage, and an act of rashness; an act of pusillanimity, and an act of great modesty or humanity: Nay, and some have had the good luck to have their very *dullness* dignified with the name of *gravity*, and to be no small gainers by the mistake. And many more such actions of dubious quality might be instanced in, too numerous to be here recounted, or insisted on. In all which, and the like, it requiring too great a sagacity for vulgar minds to draw the line nicely and exactly between

vice and *virtue*, and to adjust the due limits of each; it is no wonder, if most men attempt not a laborious scrutiny into things themselves, but only take *names* and *words*, as they first come, and so without any more ado rest in them; it being so much easier, in all disquisitions of truth, to suppose, than to prove, and to believe, than to distinguish.

Secondly, The other Reason of the same shall be taken from the great and natural inability of most men to judge exactly of things; which makes it very difficult for them to discern the real *good* and *evil* of what comes before them, to consider, and weigh circumstances, to scatter, and look through the mists of error, and so separate appearances from realities. For the greater part of mankind is but slow and dull of apprehension; and therefore in many cases under a necessity of seeing with other mens eyes, and judging with other mens understanding; *nature* having manifestly contrived things so, that the *vulgar*, and the *many*, are fit only to be *led* or *driven*, but by no means fit to guide or direct themselves.

To which their want of judging or discerning abilities, we may add also their want of leisure and opportunity to apply their minds to such a serious and attentive consideration, as may let them into a full discovery of the true

goodness

Serm. 9. *and Force of Words.* 343

goodness and *evil* of things; which are qualities, which seldom display themselves to the first view: for in most things, *good* and *evil* lie shuffled and thrust up together in a confused heap; and it is study and intention of thought which must draw them forth, and range them under their distinct heads. But there can be no study, without time; and the mind must abide and dwell upon things, or be always a stranger to the *inside* of them. *Through desire* (says Solomon) *a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom*, Prov. xviii.

12. There must be leisure and a retirement, solitude, and a sequestration of a man's self from the noise and toil of the world: for truth scorns to be seen by eyes too much fixed upon inferior objects; it lies too deep to be fetcht up with the *plough*, and too close to be beaten out with the *hammer*. It dwells not in shops or work-houses; nor till the late age was it ever known, that any one served seven years to a smith or a taylor, that he might at the end thereof proceed master of *any other arts*, but such as those trades taught him; and much less that he should commence doctor, or divine, from the shop-board, or the anvil; or from whistling to a team, come to preach to a congregation.

344 *Of the fatal Imposture* Sermon. 9.

These were the peculiar, extraordinary privileges of the late blessed times of *light* and *inspiration*: otherwise nature will still hold on its old course, never doing any thing which is considerable without the assistance of its two great helps, *art* and *industry*. But above all, the knowledge of what is *good*, and what is *evil*, what *ought*, and what *ought not* to be done, in the several offices and relations of life, is a thing too large to be compassed, and too hard to be master'd, without brains and study, parts and contemplation; which providence never thought fit to make much the greatest part of mankind possessors of. And consequently those who are not so, must, for the knowledge of most things, depend upon those who are; and receive their information concerning *good* and *evil*, from such *verbal* or *nominal* representations of each, as shall be imparted to them by those, whose ability and integrity they have cause to rely upon, for a faithful account of these matters.

And thus, from these two great considerations premised; 1. That the generality of the world are wholly governed by *words* and *names*; And 2. That the chief instance in which they are so, is in such *words* and *names*, as import the *good* or *evil* of things; (*which* both the difficulty of things themselves, and the very condition

Serm. 9. *and Force of Words.* 345

condition of human nature constrains much the greatest part of mankind to take wholly upon trust) I say, from these two considerations, must needs be inferr'd, *what* a fatal, devilish, and destructive effect the misapplication and confusion of these great governing names of *good* and *evil* must inevitably have upon the societies of men. The comprehensive mischief of which will appear from this, that it takes in *both* those ways, by which the greatest evils and calamities which are incident to man, do directly break in upon him.

The *first* of which is by his *being deceived*, and the *second* by his *being misrepresented*. And first, *for the first of these*; I do not in the least doubt, but if a true and just computation could be made of all the miseries and misfortunes that befall men in this world, two thirds of them, at least, would be found resolveable into their being deceived by false appearances of *good*: first deluding their apprehensions, and then by natural consequence perverting their actions; from which are the great *issues of life and death*; since according to the eternal sanction of God and nature, such as a man's actions are for *good* or *evil*, such ought also his condition to be for *happiness* or *misery*.

Now all deception in the course of life is indeed nothing else but a *lye* reduced to *practice*,

346 *Of the fatal Imposture* Serm. 9.
tice, and falshood passing from words into things.

For is a man impoverished and undone by the purchase of an estate? Why, it is, because he bought an imposture; pay'd down his money for a lye, and by the help of the best and ablest counsel (forsooth) that could be had, took a *bad* title for a *good*.

Is a man unfortunate in marriage? Still it is because he was deceived; and put his neck in the *snare*, before he put it into the *yoke*, and so took that for virtue and affection, which was nothing but vice in a disguise, and a devilish humour under a demure look.

Is he again unhappy and calamitous in his friendships? Why, in this also, it is because he built upon the air, and trod upon a quicksand, and took that for kindness and sincerity, which was only malice and design, seeking an opportunity to ruin him effectually, and to overturn him in all his interests by the sure, but fatal handle of his own good-nature and credulity.

And lastly, is a man betrayed, lost, and blown by such agents, and instruments, as he employs in his greatest and nearest concerns? Why, still the cause of it is from this, that he misplaced his confidence, took hypocrisy for fidelity, and so relied upon the services of a
pack

Serm. 9. *and Force of Words.* 347

pack of villains, who designed nothing but their own game, and to *stake* him, while they *played* for themselves.

But not to mention any more particulars, there is no estate, office, or condition of life whatsoever, but groans and labours under the killing truth of what we have asserted.

For it is this which supplants not only private persons, but kingdoms and governments, by keeping them ignorant of their own strengths and weaknesses; and it is evident that governments may be equally destroyed by an ignorance of either. For the weak, by thinking themselves strong, are induced to venture and proclaim war against that which ruins them; and the strong, by conceiting themselves weak, are thereby render'd as unactive, and consequently as useless, as if they really were so. In *Luke xiv. 31.* *When a king with ten thousand is to meet a king coming against him with twenty thousand,* our Saviour advises him, before he ventures the issue of a battle, *to sit down and consider.* But now a false glossing parasite would give him quite another kind of counsel, and bid him only reckon his *ten thousand forty*, call his *fool-hardiness* valour, and then he may go on *boldly*, because *blindly*, and by mistaking himself for a *lion*, come to perish like an *ass*.

In

In short, it is this great plague of the world, *deception*, which takes wrong measures, and makes false musters almost in every thing; which sounds a retreat instead of a charge, and a charge instead of a retreat; which overthrows whole armies; and sometimes by one lying word, treacherously cast out, turns the fate and fortune of states and empires, and lays the most flourishing monarchies in the dust. A blind guide is certainly a great mischief, but a guide that *blinds* those whom he should *lead*, is *undoubtedly* a much greater.

Secondly, The other great and undoing mischief, which befalls men upon the forementioned account, is by their being *misrepresented*. Now, as by *calling evil good*, a man is misrepresented to himself in the way of *flattery*; so by *calling good evil*, he is misrepresented to others in the way of *slander* and *detraction*. I say, *detraction*, that killing, poysoned *arrow* drawn out of the devil's *quiver*, which is always flying abroad, and doing execution in the *dark*; against which no virtue is a defence, no innocence a security. For, as by *flattery*, a man is usually brought to open his bosom to his mortal enemy; so by *detraction*, and a slanderous misreport of persons he is often brought to shut the same even to his best and truest friends.

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 349

friends. In both cases he receives a fatal blow, since that which strips him of a friend, equally attacks him in all those interests, that are capable of being weakened by the one, and supported by the other.

The most direct and efficacious way to ruin any man, is to misrepresent him; and it often so falls out, that it wounds on both sides, and not only mauls the person misrepresented, but him also, to whom he is misrepresented: For if he be great and powerful (as *spies* and *pick-thanks* seldom apply to any others) it generally provokes him through mistake to persecute and tyrannize over, nay, and sometimes even to dip his hands in the blood of the innocent and the just, and thereby involve himself in such a guilt, as shall arm heaven and earth against him, the vengeance of God, and the indignation of men; who will both espouse the quarrel of a bleeding innocence, and heartily join forces against an insulting baseness; especially when back'd with greatness, and set on by misinformation. Histories are full of such examples.

Besides that, it is rarely found, that men hold their greatness for term of life; tho' their *baseness*, for the most part, they do; and then, according to the common vicissitude and wheel of things, the proud and the insolent must take
their

350 *Of the fatal Imposture* Sermon. 9.

their turn too; and after long trampling upon others, come, at length, *plaudente & gaudente mundo*, to be trampled upon themselves. For, as *Tully* has it in his oration for *Milo*; *Non semper viator à latrone, nonnunquam etiam latro à viatore occiditur.*

But to pass from particulars to communities: Nothing can be imagined more destructive to society than this villainous practice. For it robs the publick of all that benefit and advantage, that it may justly claim, and ought to receive, from the worth and virtue of particular persons, by rendring their virtue utterly insignificant. For *good* itself can do no good, while it passes for *evil*; and an honest man is, in effect, useless, while he is accounted a *knave*. Both things and persons subsist by their reputation.

An unjust sentence from a tribunal may condemn an innocent person; but misrepresentation condemns innocence itself. For it is this which revives, and imitates that inhuman barbarity of the old heathen persecutors, wrapping up christians in the skins of wild beasts, that so they might be worried and torn in pieces by dogs. Do but paint an *angel* black, and that is enough to make him pass for a *devil*. *Let us blacken him, let us blacken him what we can*, said the miscreant

* *Harri-*

Serm.9. *and Force of Words.* 351

* *Harrison*, of the blessed king upon the *wording* and drawing up his charge against his approaching tryal. And when any man is to be run down, and sacrificed to the lust of his enemies, as that royal martyr was, even his *good* (according to the apostle's phrase) *shall be evil spoken of*. He must first be undermined, and then undone. The practice is usual, and the method natural. But to give you the whole malice of it in one word; it is a weapon forg'd in hell, and formed by the prime artificer, and engineer of all mischief, the *devil*; and none but that God, who knows all things, and can do all things, can protect the best of men against it.

To which God, the fountain of all good, and the hater of all evil, be render'd and ascrib'd, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.

* A preaching colonel of the parliament-army, and a chief actor in the murder of K. *Charles* the first: notable before, for having kill'd several after quarter given them by others, and using these words in the doing it, *Cursed be he who does the work of the Lord negligently*. He was by extraction a butcher's son; and accordingly, in his practices all along, more a butcher than his father.

Prevention of Sin an unvaluable Mercy:

Set forth in a

S E R M O N

O N

I *S A M.* xxv. 32, 33.

Preached at

CHRIST-CHURCH, *Oxon.*

Nov. the 10th, 1678.

SERMON X.

Prevention of Sin an unvaluable Mercy.

I S A M: XXV. 32, 33.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me.

And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand.

THESE words are *David's* retraction, or laying down of a bloody and revengeful resolution; which for a while his heart had swelled with, and carried him on with the highest transport of rage to prosecute: a resolution took up from the sense of a gross indignity

nity and affront passed upon him, in recompence of a signal favour and kindness received from him. For during his exile and flight before *Saul*, in which he was frequently put to all the hardships which usually befall the weak flying before the strong, there happening a great, and solemn festivity, such as the *sheep-shearings* used to be in those eastern countries, he condescends, by an honourable and kind message, to beg of a rich and great man, some small repast and supply for himself and his poor harassed companions, at that notable time of joy and feasting: a time that might make any thing, that look'd like want, or hunger, no less an absurdity, than a misery, to all that were round about him. And, as if the greatness of the asker, and the smallness of the thing asked, had not been sufficient to enforce his request, he *adds* a commemoration of his own generous and noble usage of the person, whom he thus addressed to; shewing how that he had been a wall, and a bulwark to all that belong'd to him, a safeguard to his estate, and a keeper of his flocks; and that both from the violence of robbers, and the licence of his own soldiers; who could much more easily have carved themselves their own provisions, than so great a spirit stoop so low as to ask them.

But

But in answer to this, (as nothing is so rude and insolent as a wealthy rustick) all this his kindness is overlooked, his request rejected, and his person most unworthily railed at; such being the nature of some base minds, that they can never do ill turns, but they must double them with ill words too. And thus *David's* messengers are sent back to him, like so many sharks and runagates; only for endeavouring to compliment an ill nature out of itself; and seeking that by petition, which they might have commanded by their sword.

And now, who would not but think, that such ungrateful usage, heighten'd with such reproachful language, might warrant the justice of the sharpest revenge; even of such a revenge, as now began to boil, and burn in the breast of this great warrior? For surely, if any thing may justly call up the utmost of a man's rage, it should be bitter and contumelious words from an unprovoked inferior; and, if any thing can legalize revenge, it should be injuries from an extremely obliged person. But for all this, revenge, we see, is so much the prerogative of the Almighty, so absolutely the peculiar of heaven, that no consideration whatsoever can empower even the best men to assume the execution of it in their own case. And therefore *David*, by a happy

and seasonable pacification, being took off from acting that *bloody* tragedy, which he was just now entring upon, and so turning his eyes from the baseness of him, who had stirr'd up his revenge, to the goodness of that God, who had prevented it; he breaks forth into these triumphant praises and doxologies, express'd in the text: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has kept me this day from shedding blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand.*

Which words, together with those going before in the same verse, naturally afford us this doctrinal proposition, which shall be the subject of the following discourse. Namely, *that prevention of sin is one of the greatest mercies, that God can vouchsafe a man in this world.*

The prosecution of which shall lie in these two things: *First*, to prove the proposition; *Secondly*, to apply it.

And *first*, for the proof of it: That transcendent greatness of this *sin-preventing mercy* is demonstrable from these four following considerations.

1. Of the condition which the sinner is in, when this mercy is vouchsafed him.
2. Of the principle or fountain from whence this *prevention* of sin does proceed.

3. Of

3. Of the hazard a man runs if the commission of sin be not *prevented*, whether ever it will come to be *pardoned*: And,

4. And *lastly*, Of the advantages accruing to the soul from the *prevention* of sin, above what can be had from the bare *pardon* of it, in case it comes to be *pardoned*.

Of these in their order: And *first*, we are to take an estimate of the greatness of this mercy, from the condition it finds the sinner in, when God is pleased to vouchsafe it to him. It finds him in the direct way to death and destruction; and, which is worse, wholly unable to help himself. For he is actually under the power of a temptation, and the sway of an impetuous lust; both hurrying him on to satisfy the cravings of it by some wicked action. He is possessed and acted by a passion, which, for the present, absolutely over-rules him; and so can no more recover himself, than a bowl rolling down an hill stop itself in the midst of its career.

It is a maxim in the philosophy of some, *that whatsoever is once in actual motion, will move for ever, if it be not hindered*: so a man, being under the drift of any passion, will still follow the impulse of it, till something interpose, and by a stronger impulse turn him another way: but in this case we can find no principle

ciple within him strong enough to counter-act that principle, and to relieve him. For, if it be any, it must be either, *first*, the judgment of his reason; or, *secondly*, the free choice of his will.

But from the first of these there can be no help for him in his present condition. For, while a man is engaged in any sinful purpose, through the prevalence of any passion, during the continuance of that passion, he fully approves of whatsoever he is carried on to do in the strength of it; and judges it, under his present circumstances, the best and most rational course that he can take. Thus we see, when *Jonas* was under the passion of anger, and God asked him, *Whether he did well to be angry?* He answered, *I do well to be angry even unto death*, Jonas iv. 9. And when *Saul* was under his persecuting fit, what he did, appeared to him good and necessary, Acts xxvi. 9. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus*. But to go no farther than the text; do we not think, that while *David's* heart was full of his revengeful design, it had blinded and perverted his reason so far, that it struck in wholly with his passion, and told him, that the bloody purpose he was going to execute, was just, magnanimous, and most becoming such a person, and so dealt with,

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 361

as he was? This being so, how is it possible for a man under a passion to receive any succour from his judgment, or reason, which is made a party in the whole action, and influenced to a present approbation of all the ill things which his passion can suggest? *This is most certain;* and every man may find it by experience, (if he will but impartially reflect upon the method of his own actings, and the motions of his own mind) that while he is under any passion, he thinks and judges quite otherwise of the proper objects of that passion, from what he does, when he is out of it. Take a man under the transports of a vehement rage or revenge, and he passes a very different judgment upon murder and blood-shed, from what he does when his revenge is over, and the flame of his fury spent. Take a man possessed with a strong and immoderate desire of any thing, and you shall find, that the worth and excellency of that thing appears much greater, and more dazzling to the eye of his mind, than it does when that desire either by satisfaction, or otherwise, is quite extinguished. So that, while passion is upon the wing, and the man fully engaged in the prosecution of some unlawful object, no remedy or controul is to be expected from his reason, which is wholly gain'd over to judge in favour of it. The fumes of his passion do as really
intoxi-

intoxicate and confound his judging and discerning faculty, as the fumes of drink discompose and stupify the brain of a man over-charged with it. When his drink indeed is over, he sees the folly and the absurdity, the madness and the vileness of those things, which before he acted with full complacency and approbation. Passion is the drunkenness of the mind; and therefore, in its present workings not controulable by reason; forasmuch as the proper effect of it is, for the time, to supersede the workings of reason. *This* principle therefore being able to do nothing to the stopping of a man in the eager pursuit of his sin, there remains no other, that can be supposed able to do any thing upon the soul, but that *second* mention'd, to wit, *the choice of his will*. But this also is as much disabled from recovering a man fully intent upon the prosecution of any of his lusts, as the former. For all the time that a man is so, he absolutely wills, and is fully pleased with what he is designing, or going about. And whatsoever perfectly pleases the will, over-powers it; for it fixes and determines the inclination of it to that one thing which is before it; and so fills up all its possibilities of indifference, that there is actually no room for choice. He who is under the power of melancholy, is pleased with his being so; he who is
angry,

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 363

angry, delights in nothing so much as in the venting of his rage; and he who is lustful, places his greatest satisfaction in a slavish following the dictates of his lust. And so long as the will and the affections are pleased, and exceedingly gratified in any course of acting, it is impossible for a man (so far as he is at his own disposal) not to continue in it; or, by any principle within him, to be diverted or took off from it.

From all which we see, that when a man has *took up* a full purpose of sinning, he is hurried on to it in the strength of all those principles which nature has given him to act by: for sin having depraved his *judgment*, and got possession of his *will*, there is no other principle left him naturally, by which he can make head against it. Nor is this all; but to these internal dispositions to sin, add the external opportunities and occasions concurring with them, and removing all lets and rubs out of the way, and (as it were) making the *path* of destruction *plain before the sinner's face*; so that he may run his course freely, and without interruption. Nay, when opportunities shall lie so fair, as not only to *permit*, but even to *invite* and *further* a progress in sin; so that the sinner shall set forth, like a ship launched into the wide sea; not only well-built and rigg'd,
but

but also carried on with full *wind* and *tide*, to the port or place it is bound for; surely in this case, nothing under heaven can be imagined able to stop or countermand a sinner amidst all these circumstances promoting, and pushing on his sinful design. For all that can give force and fury to motion both from within, and from without, jointly meet to bear him forward in his present attempt. He presses on like an *horse rushing into the battle*, and all that should withstand him giving way before him.

Now under this deplorable necessity of ruin and destruction does God's *preventing grace* find every sinner, when it *snatches him like a brand out of the fire*, and steps in between the purpose, and the commission of his sin. It finds him going on resolutely in the *high and broad-way* to perdition; which yet his perverted reason tells him, is right, and his will, *pleasant*: and therefore he has no power of himself to leave, or turn out of it; but he is ruined joycundly and pleasantly, and damned according to his heart's desire. And can there be a more wretched and woeful spectacle of misery, than a man in such a condition? A man pleasing and destroying himself together; a man (as it were) doing violence to damnation, and taking hell by force? So that when the *preventing goodness* of God reaches out its arm, and pulls him
out

out of this fatal path, it does by main force even wrest him from himself, and save him as it were against his will.

But neither is this his total inability to recover or relieve himself the worst of his condition; but, which is yet much worse, it puts him unto a state of actual hostility against, and defiance of, that Almighty God, from whom alone, in this helpless, and forlorn condition, he is capable of receiving help. For surely, while a man is going on in a full purpose of sin, he is trampling upon all law, spitting in the face of heaven, and provoking his Maker in the highest manner; so that none is, or can be so much concerned as God himself, to destroy and cut off such an one, and to vindicate the honour of his great name, by striking him dead in his rebellion. And this brings us to the

2. Thing proposed; which was to shew: What is the *fountain* or *impulsive cause* of this *prevention of sin*? It is perfectly *free grace*. A man at best, upon all principles of divinity, and sound philosophy, is incapable of *meriting* any thing from God. But surely, while he is under the dominion of sin, and engaged in full design and purpose to commit it, it is not imaginable what can be found in him to oblige the divine grace in his behalf. For he is in high and actual rebellion against the only Giver
of

of such grace. And therefore it must needs flow from a redundant, unaccountable fulness of compassion; shewing mercy, *because it will shew mercy*; from a compassion, which is, and must be its own reason; and can have no argument for its exercise, but itself. No man in the strength of the *first grace*, can merit the *second*, (as some fondly speak, for reason they do not) unless a beggar, by receiving one alms, can be said to merit another. It is not from what a man *is*, or what he has *done*; from any *virtue* or *excellency*, any preceding worth or desert in him, that God is induced thus to interpose between him and ruin, and so stop him in his full career to damnation. No, says God, in *Ezek. xvi. 6. When I passed by, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.* The spirit of God speaks this great truth to the hearts of men with emphasis and repetition, knowing what an aptness there is in them to oppose it. God sees a man wallowing in his native filth and impurity, delivered over as an absolute captive to sin, polluted with its guilt, and enslaved by its power; and in this most loathsome condition fixes upon him as an object of his distinguishing mercy. And to shew yet further, that the actings of this mercy, in the work of *prevention*, are entirely

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 367

tirely free; do we not sometimes see, in persons of equal guilt and demerit, and of equal progress and advance in the ways of sin; some of them maturely diverted, and took off, and others permitted to go on without check or controul, till they finish a sinful course in final perdition? So true is it, that, if things were cast upon this issue, that God should never prevent sin, till something in man deserved it, the best of men would fall into sin, continue in sin, and sin on for ever.

And thus much for the *second* thing proposed; which was to shew, *What was the principle, or fountain, from whence this prevention of sin does proceed.* Come we now to the

3d. Demonstration, or proof of the greatness of this *preventing mercy*, taken from the *hazard a man runs, if the commission of sin be not prevented, whether ever it will come to be pardoned.*

In order to the clearing of which, I shall lay down these two considerations.

1. That if sin be not thus prevented, it will certainly be committed; and the reason is, because, on the sinner's part, there will be always a strong inclination to sin. So that, if other things concur, and providence cuts not off the opportunity, the act of sin must needs follow. For an active principle, seconded with the opportunities of action, will infallibly exert itself.

2. The

2. The other consideration is, that in every sin deliberately committed, there are (generally speaking) many more degrees of probability, that that sin will never come to be pardoned, than that it will.

And this shall be made appear upon these *three* following accounts.

1. Because every commission of sin introduces into the soul a certain degree of hardness, and an aptness to continue in that sin. It is a known maxim, that it is much more difficult to *throw out*, than *not to let in*. Every degree of entrance is a degree of possession. Sin taken into the soul, is like a liquor poured into a vessel; so much of it as it fills, it also seasons. The touch and tincture go together. So that although the body of the liquor should be poured out again, yet still it leaves that tang behind it, which makes the vessel fitter for that, than for any other. In like manner, every act of sin strangely transforms and works over the soul to its own likeness; sin in this being to the soul, like fire to combustible matter; it assimilates, before it destroys it.

2. A second reason is, because every commission of sin imprints upon the soul a further disposition and proneness to sin: as the second, third and fourth degrees of heat are more easily introduced, than the first. Every one is
both

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 369

both a preparative, and a step to the next. Drinking both quenches the present thirst, and provokes it for the future. When the soul is beaten from its first station, and the mounds and outworks of virtue are once broken down, it becomes quite another thing from what it was before. In one single eating of the forbidden fruit, when the act is over, yet the relish remains; and the remembrance of the first repast is an easy allurements to the second. One visit is enough to begin an acquaintance; and this point is gained by it, that when the visitant comes again, he is no more a stranger.

3. The third and grand reason is, because the only thing, that can entitle the sinner to pardon, which is repentance, is not in the sinner's power. And he who goes about the work, will find it so. It is the gift of God; and though God has certainly promised forgiveness of sin to every one who repents, yet he has not promised to any one to give him grace to repent. This is the sinner's hard lot; that the same thing which makes him need repentance, makes him also in danger of not obtaining it. For it provokes and offends that *Holy Spirit*, which alone can bestow this grace. As the same treason which puts a traitor in need of his prince's mercy, is a great and a just provocation to his prince to deny it him.

Now, let these three things be put together: *First*, that every commission of sin, in some degree, hardens the soul in that sin. *Secondly*, that every commission of sin disposes the soul to proceed further in sin. And, *Thirdly*, that to repent, and turn from sin (without which all pardon is impossible) is not in the sinner's power; and then, I suppose, there cannot but appear a greater likelihood, that a sin once committed, will, in the issue, not be pardon'd, than that it will. To all which, add the confirmation of general experience, and the real event of things, that where one man ever comes to repent, an hundred, I might say a thousand at least, end their days in final impenitence.

All which considered, surely there cannot need a more pregnant argument of the greatness of this *preventing mercy*; if it did no more for a man than this, that his grand, immortal concern, more valuable to him than ten thousand worlds, is not *thrown* upon a critical point; that he is not *brought* to his last stake; that he is rescued from the first descents into hell, and the high probabilities of damnation.

For, whatsoever the issue proves, it is certainly a miserable thing to be forced to cast lots for one's life; yet in every sin a man does the same for eternity. And therefore, let the boldest sinner take this one consideration along with him,

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 371

him, when he is going to sin, that whether the sin he is about to act ever comes to be pardoned or no; yet, as soon as it is acted, it quite turns the balance, puts his salvation upon the venture, leaves him but one cast for all; and, which is yet much more dreadful, makes it ten to one odds against him.

But, let us now alter the state of the matter so, as to leave no doubt in the case: but suppose that the sin, which upon non-prevention comes to be committed, comes also to be repented of, and consequently to be pardoned. Yet, in the

Fourth and last place, the greatness of this *preventing mercy* is eminently proved from those advantages accruing to the soul, from the *prevention* of sin, above what can be had from the bare *pardon* of it. And that in these two great respects.

1. Of the *cleanness* of a man's condition.

2. Of the *satisfaction* of his mind. And,

1. For the *cleanness* of his condition. If innocence be preferable to repentance; and to be *clean* be more desirable than to be *cleansed*; then surely *prevention* of sin ought to have the precedence of its *pardon*. For, so much of prevention, so much of innocence. There are indeed various degrees of it; and God in his infinite wisdom does not deal forth the same

measure of his *preventing grace* to all. Sometimes he may suffer the soul but just to begin the sinful production, in reflecting upon a sin suggested by the imagination, with some complacency and delight; which, in the apostle's phrase, is *to conceive sin*; and then, in these early imperfect beginnings, God perhaps may presently dash and extinguish it. Or, possibly, he may permit the sinful *conception* to receive life and form, by passing into a purpose of committing it; and then he may make it prove abortive, by stifling it, before ever it comes to the birth. Or, perhaps, God may think fit to let it come *even to the birth*, by some strong endeavours to commit it; and yet then deny it *strength to bring forth*; so that it never comes into actual commission. Or, lastly, God may suffer it to be born, and see the world, by permitting the endeavour of sin to pass into the commission of it: and this is the last fatal step but one; which is by frequent repetition of the sinful act, to continue and persist in it, till at length it settle into a fixed, confirmed habit of sin, which being properly that, which the apostle calls the *finishing of sin*, ends certainly in *death*; death, not only as to merit, but also as to actual infliction.

Now peradventure in this whole progress, *preventing grace* may sometimes come in to the
poor

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 373

poor sinner's help but at *the last hour of the day*; and having suffered him to run all the former risque and maze of sin, and to descend so many steps downwards to the black regions of death: as first, from the bare thought and imagination of sin, to look upon it with some beginnings of appetite and delight; from thence to purpose and intend it; and from intending to endeavour it; and from endeavouring actually to commit it; and having committed it, perhaps for some time to continue in it. And then (I say) after all this, God may turn the fatal stream, and by a mighty grace interrupt its course, and keep it from passing into a settled habit, and so hinder the absolute completion of sin in final obduracy.

Certain it is, that wheresoever it pleases God to stop the sinner on this side hell, how far soever he has been advanced in his way towards it, it is a vast, ineffable mercy; a mercy as great as life from the dead, and salvation to a man tottering with horror upon the very edge and brink of destruction. But if, more than all this, God shall be pleased by an early grace to prevent sin so soon, as to keep the soul in the virginity of its first innocence, not tainted with the desires, and much less deflowered with the formed purpose of any thing vile and sinful; what an infinite goodness is this? It is not a

converting, but a *crowning* grace; such an one as irradiates, and puts a circle of glory about the head of him upon whom it descends; it is the *Holy Ghost* coming down upon him *in the form of a dove*; and setting him triumphant above the necessity of tears and sorrow, mourning and repentance, the sad after-games of a lost innocence. And this brings in the consideration of that other great advantage accruing to the soul from the *prevention of sin* above what can be had from the bare pardon of it: namely,

2. *The satisfaction of a man's mind.* There is that true joy, that solid and substantial comfort conveyed to the heart by *preventing grace*, which *pardoning grace*, at the best, very seldom, and, for the most part, never gives. For, since all joy passes into the heart through the understanding, the object of it must be known by one, before it can affect the other. Now, when grace keeps a man so within his bounds, that sin is *prevented*, he certainly knows it to be so; and so rejoices upon the firm, infallible ground of sense and assurance. But on the other side, though grace may have reversed the condemning sentence, and sealed the sinner's pardon before God, yet it may have left no transcript of that pardon in the sinner's breast. The *hand-writing* against him may be cancelled in the *court of heaven*, and yet the indictment

run

run on in the *court of conscience*. So that a man may be *safe* as to his condition, but in the mean time *dark* and *doubtful* as to his apprehensions; *secure* in his pardon, but *miserable* in the ignorance of it; and so passing all his days in the disconsolate, uneasy vicissitudes of hopes and fears, at length go out of the world, not knowing whither he goes. And what is this, but a black cloud drawn over all a man's comforts? A cloud, which though it cannot hinder the supporting *influence* of heaven, yet will be sure to intercept the refreshing *light* of it. The *pardoned person* must not think to stand upon the same vantage-ground with the *innocent*. It is enough that they are both equally *safe*; but it cannot be thought, that without a rare privilege, both can be equally *cheerful*. And, thus much for the advantageous effects of *preventing*, above those of *pardoning* grace: which was the fourth and last argument brought for the proof of the proposition. Pass we now to the next general thing proposed for the prosecution of it; namely,

2. Its *application*. Which, from the foregoing discourse, may afford us several useful deductions, but chiefly by way of *information*, in these three following particulars. As,

First, This may inform and convince us, how vastly greater a pleasure is consequent upon

the *forbearance* of sin, than can possibly accompany the *commission* of it; and, how much higher a satisfaction is to be found from a *conquered*, than from a *conquering passion*. For the proof of which, we need look no farther than the great example here before us. Revenge is certainly the most luscious morsel that the devil can put into the sinner's mouth. But do we think, that *David* could have found half that pleasure in the execution of his revenge, that he expresses here upon the disappointment of it? Possibly it might have pleased him in the present heat and hurry of his rage, but must have displeased him infinitely more in the cool, sedate reflexions of his mind. For sin can please no longer, than for that pitiful space of time while it is committing; and surely the present pleasure of a sinful act is a poor countervail for the bitterness of the review, which begins where the action ends, and lasts for ever. There is no ill thing which a man does in his passion, but his memory will be revenged on him for it afterwards.

All pleasure springing from a gratify'd passion, as most of the pleasure of sin does, must needs determine with that passion. 'Tis short, violent, and fallacious; and, as soon as the imagination is disabused, will certainly be at an end. And therefore *Des Cartes* prescribes excel-

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 377

excellently well for the regulation of the passions, *viz.* That a man should fix and forearm his mind with this settled persuasion, that, during that commotion of his blood and spirits, in which passion properly consists, whatsoever is offered to his imagination in favour of it, tends only to deceive his reason. It is indeed a real trapan upon it; feeding it with colours and appearances, instead of arguments; and driving the very same bargain, which *Jacob* did with *Esau*, a *mess of pottage* for a *birth-right*, a present repast for a perpetuity.

Secondly, We have here a sure unfailing *criterion*, by which every man may discover, and find out the gracious or ungracious disposition of his own heart. The temper of every man is to be judged of from the thing he most esteems; and the object of his *esteem* may be measured by the prime object of his *thanks*. What is it, that opens thy mouth in praises, that fills thy heart, and lifts up thy hands in grateful acknowledgments to thy great Creator and Preserver? Is it, that thy bags and thy barns are full, that thou hast escaped this sickness, or that danger? Alas, God may have done all this for thee in anger! All this fair sunshine may have been only to harden thee in thy sins. He may have given thee riches and honour, health and power with a curse; and if so, it
will

will be found but a poor comfort, to have had never so great a share of God's *bounty*, without his *blessing*.

But, has he at any time kept thee from thy sin? Stopt thee in the prosecution of thy lust? Defeated the malicious arts and stratagems of thy mortal enemy the tempter? And, does not the sense of this move and affect thy heart more than all the former instances of temporal prosperity, which are but (as it were) the promiscuous scatterings of his common providence, while these are the distinguishing kindnesses of his special grace?

A truly pious mind has certainly another kind of relish and taste of these things; and, if it receives a temporal blessing with gratitude, it receives a spiritual one with ecstasy and transport. *David*, an heroick instance of such a temper, over-looks the rich and seasonable present of *Abigail*, though pressed with hunger and travel; but her advice, which disarmed his rage, and calmed his revenge, draws forth those high and affectionate gratulations from him: *Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from shedding blood, and avenging myself with my own hand.* These were his joyful and glorious trophies; not that he triumphed over his enemy, but that he insulted over his revenge; that he escaped from himself,

himself, and was delivered from his own fury. And whosoever has any thing of *David's* piety, will be perpetually plying the throne of grace with such like acknowledgements; As, “ *Blessed* be that providence, which delivered me “ from such a lewd company, and such a vicious acquaintance, which was the bane of “ such and such a person. And, *blessed be that* “ *God*, who cast rubs, and stops, and hindrances in my way, when I was attempting “ the commission of such or such a sin; who “ took me out of such a course of life, such “ a place, or such an employment, which was “ a continual snare and temptation to me. “ And, *blessed be such a preacher*, and such a “ friend, whom God made use of to speak a “ word in season to my wicked heart, and so “ turned me out of the paths of death and destruction, and saved me in spite of the “ world, the devil, and myself.”

These are such things as a man shall remember with joy upon his death-bed; such as shall cheer and warm his heart even in that last and bitter agony, when many from the very bottom of their souls shall wish, that they had never been rich, or great, or powerful; and reflect with anguish and remorse upon those splendid occasions of sin, which served them for little, but to heighten their guilt, and at best to inflame

in flame their accounts, at that great tribunal which they are going to appear before.

3. In the *third* and *last* place; We learn from hence the great reasonableness of, not only a *contented*, but also a *thankful* acquiescence in any condition, and under the crossiest and severest passages of providence, which can possibly befall us: since there is none of all these but may be the instrument of *preventing grace* in the hands of a merciful God, to keep us from those courses which would otherwise assuredly end in our confusion. This is most certain, that there is no enjoyment which the nature of man is either desirous or capable of, but may be to him a direct inducement to sin, and consequently is big with mischief, and carries death in the bowels of it. But to make the assertion more particular, and thereby more convincing, let us take an account of it with reference to the three greatest and deservedly most valued enjoyments of this life.

1st. *Health*, 2dly. *Reputation*; And, 3dly. *Wealth*.

First. And first for *health*. Has God made a breach upon that? Perhaps he is building up thy soul upon the ruins of thy body. Has he bereaved thee of the use and vigour of thy limbs? Possibly he saw, that otherwise they would have been the instruments of thy lusts,
and

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 381

and the active ministers of thy debaucheries. Perhaps thy languishing upon thy bed has kept thee from rotting in a gaol, or in a worse place. God saw it necessary by such mortifications to quench the boilings of a furious, overflowing appetite, and the boundless rage of an insatiable intemperance; to make the weakness of the *flesh* the phylick and restaurative of the *spirit*; and, in a word, rather to save thee, diseased, sickly and deformed, than to let strength, health and beauty drive thee headlong (as they have done many thousands) into eternal destruction.

Secondly, Has God in his providence thought fit to drop a blot upon thy name, and to blast thy reputation? He saw perhaps, that the breath of popular air was grown infectious, and would have derived a contagion upon thy better part. Pride and vain-glory had mounted thee too high, and therefore it was necessary for mercy to take thee down, to prevent a greater fall. *A good name is, indeed, better than life*; but a sound mind is better than both. Praise and applause had swell'd thee to a proportion ready to burst; it had vitiated all thy spiritual appetites, and brought thee to feed upon the air, and to surfeit upon the wind, and, in a word, to starve thy soul only to pamper thy imagination.

And

And now, if God makes use of some poygnant disgrace to prick this enormous bladder, and to let out the poysonous vapour, is not the mercy greater than the severity of the cure? *Cover them with shame*, (says the *Psalmist*) that *they may seek thy name*. Fame and glory transports a man out of himself; and, like a violent wind, though it may bear him up a while, yet it will be sure to let him fall at last. It makes the mind loose and garish, scatters the spirits, and leaves a kind of dissolution upon all the faculties. Whereas *shame* on the contrary (as all grief does) naturally contracts and unites, and thereby fortifies the spirits, and fixes the ramblings of fancy, and so reduces and gathers the man into himself. This is the sovereign effect of a bitter potion, administered by a wise and merciful hand: and what hurt can there be in all the slanders, obloquies and disgraces of this world, if they are but the arts and methods of providence to shame us into the *glories* of the next? But then,

Thirdly and *lastly*, has God thought fit to cast thy lot amongst the poor of this world, and that either by denying thee any share of the plenties of this life, (which is something grievous) or by taking them away, which is much more so? Yet still all this may be but the effect of *preventing* mercy. For so much mischief

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 383

as riches have done, and may do, to the souls of men, so much mercy may there be in taking them away. For does not the wisest of men, next our Saviour, tell us of *riches kept to the hurt of the owners* of them? *Eccles. v. 13.* And does not our Saviour himself speak of the intolerable difficulty, which they cause in mens passage to heaven? Do they not make the *narrow way* much narrower; and contract *the gate which leads to life* to the *streightness of a needle's eye*?

And now, if God will fit thee for this passage, by taking off thy load, and emptying thy bags, and so suit the narrowness of thy fortune to the *narrowness of the way* thou art to pass, is there any thing but mercy in all this? Nay, are not the *riches* of his mercy conspicuous in the *poverty* of thy condition?

Thou who repinest at the plenty and splendor of thy neighbour, at the greatness of his incomes, and the magnificence of his retinue; consider what are frequently the dismal, wretched consequences of all this, and thou wilt have little cause to envy this gaudy great one, or to wish thyself in his room.

For do we not often hear of this or that young heir newly come to his father's vast estate? An happy man, no doubt! But, does not the town presently ring of his debaucheries,

ries, his blasphemies, and his murders? Are not his riches and his lewdnesses talk'd of together? and the odiousness of one heightned and set off by the greatness of the other? Are not his oaths, his riots, and other villainies, reckon'd by as *many thousands* as his estate?

Now consider, had this grand debauchee, this glistening monster, been born to thy poverty and mean circumstances, he could not have contracted such a clamorous guilt, he could not have been so bad: nor, perhaps, had thy birth inflated thee in the same wealth and greatness, wouldst thou have been at all better.

This God foresaw, and knew, in the ordering both of his and thy condition: and which of the two now, can we think, is the greater debtor to his *preventing* mercy? Lordly sins require lordly estates to support them: and where providence denies the latter, it cuts off all temptation to the former.

And thus I have shewn by particular instances, what cause men have to acquiesce in, and submit to the harshest dispensations that providence can measure out to them in this life; and with what satisfaction, or rather gratitude, that ought to be *endured*, by which the greatest of mischiefs is *prevented*. The great Physician of souls, sometimes, cannot cure
without

Serm. 10. *an unvaluable Mercy.* 385

without cutting us. Sin has fester'd inwardly, and he must lance the imposthume, to let out death with the suppuration. He who ties a mad-man's hands, or takes away his sword, loves his person, while he disarms his frenzy. And whether by health or sickness, honour or disgrace, wealth or poverty, life or death, mercy is still contriving, acting, and carrying on the spiritual good of all those who *love God*, and are *loved by him*.

*To whom (therefore) be render'd and ascribed,
as is most due, all praise, might, majesty,
and dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.*

Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience:

A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY

A T

CHRIST-CHURCH, *Oxon.*

November 1. 1691.

Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience:

A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY

AT

CHRIST-CHURCH, OXON.

November. 1. 1691.

SERMON XI.

Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience.

I JOHN iii. 21.

*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we
have confidence towards God.*

AS nothing can be of more moment; so few things, *doubtless*, are of more difficulty, than for men to be rationally satisfied about the estate of their souls, with reference to God, and the great concerns of eternity. In their judgment about which, if they err finally, it is like a man's missing his cast, when he throws *dice* for *his life*; his being, his happiness, and all that he does, or can enjoy in the world, is involved in the error of one throw. And therefore it may very well deserve our best skill and care, to inquire into those rules, by which we

may guide our *judgment* in so weighty an affair, both with safety and success. And this, I think, cannot be better done, than by separating the *false* and *fallacious* from the *true* and *certain*. For, if the *rule* we judge by be *uncertain*, it is odds but we shall judge wrong; and, if we should judge right; yet it is not properly *skill*, but *chance*; not a true judgment, but a lucky hit: which certainly, the eternal interests of an immortal soul are of much too high a value to be left at the mercy of.

First of all then: He who would pass such a judgment *upon his condition*, as shall be ratified in heaven, and confirmed at that great tribunal, from which there lies no appeal, will find himself wofully deceived, if he judges of his *spiritual estate* by any of these four following measures: As,

I. *The general esteem of the world concerning him.* He, who owes his *piety* to fame and hearsay, and the *evidences of his salvation* to popular voice and opinion, builds his house not only *upon the sand*, but (which is worse) upon the *wind*; and writes the *deeds*, by which he holds his estate, upon the face of a *river*. He makes a *bodily eye* to judge of things impossible to be *seen*; and humour and ignorance (which the generality of men both think and speak by) the *great proofs* of his justification. But, surely,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 391

no man has the *estate of his soul* drawn upon *his face*, nor the decree of his *election* wrote upon *his forehead*. He who would know a man thoroughly, must follow him into the closet of his heart; the door of which is kept shut to all the world besides, and the inspection of which is only the prerogative of Omniscience.

The favourable opinion, and good word of men (to *some persons* especially) comes oftentimes at a very easy rate; and, by a few demure *looks*, and affected *whines*, set off with some odd, devotional postures and grimaces, and such other little arts of dissimulation, cunning men will do wonders, and commence presently heroes for sanctity, self-denial, and sincerity, while within perhaps they are as *proud as Lucifer*; as *covetous as Demas*, as *false as Judas*; and, in the whole course of their conversation, *act*, and *are acted*, not by devotion, but design.

So that, for ought I see, though the *Mosaical* part of *Judaism* be abolished amongst christians, the *Pharisaical* part of it never will: A grave, stanch, skilfully *managed face*, set upon a grasping, aspiring mind, having got many a sly formalist the reputation of a *primitive and severe piety*, (forsooth) and made many such mountebanks pass admired, even for *saints upon earth*, (as the word is) who are like to be so no-where else.

But a man, who had never seen the stately outside of a *tomb*, or *painted sepulchre* before, may very well be excused, if he takes it rather for the *repository of some rich treasure*, than of a *noisome corps*; but should he but once open and rake into it, though he could not *see*, he would quickly *smell out*, his mistake. The greatest part of the world is nothing but *appearance*, nothing but *shew and surface*; and many make it their business, their study and concern, that it should be so; who having for many years together deceived all about them, are at last willing to deceive themselves too; and by a long, immemorial practice, and (as it were) *prescription* of an aged, thorough-pac'd *hypocrisy*, come at length to believe that for a *reality*, which, at the first practice of it, they themselves knew to be a cheat. But, if men love to be deceived, and fooled about so great an interest as that of their *spiritual estate*, it must be confessed, that they cannot take a surer and more effectual course to be so, than by taking their neighbours word for that, which can be known to them only from their *own hearts*. For, certainly it is not more absurd to undertake to tell the *name* of an *unknown person by his looks*, than to vouch a man's *sainthood* from the *vogue* of the world, founded upon *his external behaviour*.

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 393

2. The judgment of any *casuist* or *learned divine*, concerning the *estate of a man's soul*, is not sufficient to give him confidence towards God. And the reason is, because no learning whatsoever can give a man the knowledge of another's *heart*. Besides, that it is more than possible that the most profound and experienced *casuist* in the world may mistake in his judgment of a man's spiritual condition; and, if he does judge right, yet the man cannot be sure that he will declare that judgment sincerely and impartially, (the *greatest clerks* being not always the *honestest*, any more than the *wisest men*) but may purposely sooth a man up for hope or fear, or the service of some sinister interest; and to shew him the face of a foul soul in a flattering glass: considering how much the raising in some men a false hope of another world, may with others, serve a real interest in *this*.

There is a generation of men, who have framed their casuistical divinity to a perfect compliance with all the corrupt affections of a man's nature; and by that new-invented engine of the *doctrine of probability*, will undertake to warrant and quiet the sinner's conscience in the commission of any sin whatsoever, provided there be but the *opinion of one learned man* to vouch it. For this, they say, is a sufficient
ground

ground for the conscience of any unlearned person to rely, and to act upon. So that if but *one doctor* asserts, that I may lawfully kill a man, to prevent a box on the ear, or a calumny, by which he would otherwise asperse my good name, I may with a good conscience, do it; nay, I may safely rest upon this one casuist's judgment, though thousands, as learned as himself, yea, and the express *law of God* besides, affirm the quite contrary. But these spiritual engineers know well enough, how to deal with any commandment, either by taking, or expounding it, *away*, at their pleasure.

Such an ascendant have these *Romish* casuists over *scripture*, *reason*, and *morality*; much like what is said of the stupid, modern *Jews*, that they have subdued their *sense* and *reason* to such a sottish servitude to their *Rabbies*, as to hold, that in case two *Rabbies* should happen to contradict one another, they were yet bound to believe the contradictory assertions of both to be equally certain, and equally the word of God: Such an iron-digesting faith have they, and such pity it is, that there should be no such thing in *Judaism* as *transubstantiation* to employ it upon.

But, as for these casuists, whom I have been speaking of; if the judgment of *one doctor* may authorize the practice of any action, I believe,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 395

believe, it will *be hard to find* any sort or degree of villainy, which the corruption of man's nature is capable of committing, which shall not meet with a *defence*. And of this, I could give such an instance from something wrote by a certain prelate of theirs, cardinal and archbishop of *Beneventum*, as were enough, not only to astonish all pious ears, but almost to unconsecrate the very church I speak in.

But the truth is, the way, by which these *Romish casuists* speak *peace* to the consciences of men, is either by teaching them, that many actions *are not sins*, which yet really are so; or, by suggesting something to them, which shall satisfy their minds, notwithstanding a known, actual, avowed continuance in their sins: such as are their *pardons* and *indulgences*, and giving men a share in the *saints merits*, out of the common bank and treasury of the church, which the *pope* has the sole custody and disposal of, and is never kept *shut* to such as come with an *open hand*. So that according to these *new evangelists*, well may we pronounce, *Blessed are the rich, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. But God deliver the world from such *guides*, or rather such *bucklers* of souls, the very shame of religion, and the shameless subverters of morality. And, it is really matter both of wonder and indignation,
that

that such *impostors* should at all concern themselves about rules or directions of conscience, who seem to have no consciences to apply them to.

3. The *absolution* pronounced by a priest, whether *papist* or *protestant*, is not a certain, infallible ground, to give the person so absolved, confidence towards God: and the reason is, because, if *absolution*, as such, could of itself secure a man, as to the estate of his soul, then it would follow, that very person, so absolved, should, by virtue thereof, be *ipso facto*, put into such a condition of safety; which is not imaginable.

For the absolution pronounced must be either *conditional*, as running upon the conditions of *faith* and *repentance*; and then, if those conditions are not found in the person so absolved, it is but a seal to a blank, and so a mere nullity to him. Or, the *absolution* must be pronounced in terms *absolute* and *unconditional*: and if so, then the said *absolution* becomes valid and effectual, either by virtue of the *state* of the person, to whom it was pronounced, as being a *true penitent*, or by virtue of the *opus operatum*, or bare action itself of the priest absolving him. If it receives its *validity* from the former; then it is clear, that although it runs in forms *absolute*, yet it is indeed *conditional*,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 397

onal, as depending upon the *qualification* of the person, to whom it is pronounced; who therefore owes the remission of his sins, not properly to the *priest's absolution*, but to his own *repentance*; which made that absolution effectual, and would undoubtedly have saved him, though the priest had never absolved him.

But if it be asserted, that the *very action* of the *priest absolving him* has of itself this virtue; then we must grant also, that it is in the priest's power to save a man, who never repented, nor did one good *work* in all his life; forasmuch as it is in his power to perform this *action* upon him in full form, and with full intention to *absolve him*. But the horrible absurdity, blasphemy, and impiety of this assertion, sufficiently proclaims its falsity without any farther confutation.

In a word, if a man be a *penitent*, his *repentance* stamps his *absolution* effectual. If not, let the priest repeat the same *absolution* to him ten thousand times; yet for all his being *absolved in this world*, God will condemn him in the other. And consequently, he who places his salvation upon this ground, will find himself like an imprisoned and condemned malefactor, who in the night dreams that he is released, but in the morning finds himself led to the gallows.

4. And *lastly*, no advantages from external church membership, or profession of the true religion, can of themselves give a man confidence towards God: and yet perhaps there is hardly any one thing in the world which men, in all ages, have generally more cheated themselves with. The *Jews* were an eminent instance of this: who, because they were the *sons of Abraham*, as it is readily acknowledged by our Saviour, *John* viii. 37. And because they were entrusted with the oracles of God, *Rom.* iii. 2. Together with the covenants and the promises, *Rom.* ix. 4. That is, in other words, because they were the true church, and professors of the true religion, (while all the world about them lay wallowing in ignorance, heathenism and idolatry) they concluded from hence, that God was so fond of them, that notwithstanding all their villainies and immoralities, they were still the darlings of heaven, and the only heirs-apparent of salvation. They thought (it seems) God and themselves linked together in so fast, but withal so strange a covenant, that although they never performed their part of it, God was yet bound to make good every tittle of his.

And this made *John* the baptist set himself with so much acrimony and indignation to baffle this senseless, arrogant conceit of theirs, which made them huff at the doctrine of repentance,

as

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 399

as a thing below them, and not at all belonging to them; in *Matth. iii. ver. 9.* *Think not* (says he) *to say within yourselves,, we have Abraham to our father.* This, he knew, lay deep in their hearts, and was still in their mouths, and kept them insolent and impenitent under sins of the highest and most clamorous guilt; though our Saviour himself also, not long after this, assured them that they were of a very different stock and parentage from that, which they boasted of; and that whosoever was their father upon the *natural* account, the devil was certainly so upon a *moral*.

In like manner, how vainly do the Romanists pride and value themselves upon the name of *catholicks*, of the *catholick religion*, and of the *catholick church*? Though a title no more applicable to the *church of Rome*, than a man's finger, when it is swelled and putrefied, can be called his *whole body*: a church which allows *salvation* to none without it, nor awards *damnation* to almost any within it. And therefore, as the former empty *plea* served the sottish *Jews*; so, no wonder, if this equally serves these, to put them into a *fool's paradise*, by feeding their hopes, without changing their lives; and, as an excellent expedient, first to assure them of heaven, and then to bring them easily to it; and so, in a word, to save both *their souls*, and *their sins* too.

And

And to shew, how the same cheat runs through all professions; though not in the same dress; none are more powerfully and grossly under it, than another sort of men; who, on the contrary, place *their whole acceptance with God*, and indeed their whole religion, upon a mighty zeal (or rather out-cry) against *popery and superstition*; verbally, indeed, uttered against *the church of Rome*, but really against the church of *England*. To which sort of persons I shall say no more but this, (and that in the spirit of truth and meekness) *namely*; that zeal and noise against *popery*, and real services for it, are no such inconsistent things, as some may imagine; indeed no more than *invectives against papists*, and *solemn addresses of thanks to them*, for that very thing, by which they would have brought in *popery* upon us. And if those of the separation do not yet know so much, (thanks to them for it) we of the church of *England* do; and so may they themselves too, in due time. I speak not this by way of *sarcasm*, to reproach them, (I leave that to their own consciences, which will do it more effectually) but by way of *charity* to warn them: for let them be assured, that this whole scene and practice of theirs, is as really *superstition*, and as false a bottom to rest their souls upon, as either the *Jews alledging Abraham for their father*,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 401

ther, while the *devil* claimed them for his *children*; or the papists relying upon *their indulgences*, their *saints merits*, and *supererogations*, and such other fopperies, as can never *settle*, nor indeed so much as *reach*, the conscience; and much less recommend it *to that Judge*, who is not to be flamm'd off with words and phrases, and *names*, tho' taken out of the scripture itself.

Nay, and I shall proceed yet farther. It is not a man's being of the *church of England* itself, (though undoubtedly the purest and best reformed church in the world; indeed so well reformed, that it will be found a much easier work to *alter*, than to *better* its constitution; I say, it is not a man's being even of this excellent church) which can of it self clear accounts between God and his conscience: since bare communion with a good church, can never alone *make a good man*: for, if it could, I am sure we should have no bad ones in ours; and much less such as would betray it.

So that we see here, that it is but too manifest, that men of all churches and persuasions are *strangely* apt to flatter and deceive themselves with what they *believe*, and what they *profess*: and if we thoroughly consider the matter, we shall find the fallacy to lie in this; that those religious institutions, which God designed

only for *means, helps, and advantages*, to promote and further men in the practice of holiness, they look upon rather, as a *privilege* to serve them *instead of it*, and really to commute *for it*. This is the very case, and a fatal self-imposture it is certainly, and such an one as defeats the design, and *destroys* the force of all religion.

And thus, I have shewn *four* several uncertain and deceitful *rules*, which men are prone to judge of their *spiritual estate* by.

But now, have we any better or more certain to substitute and recommend in the room of them? Why, yes; if we believe the apostle, a man's own *heart* or *conscience* is that, which above all other things, is able to give him *confidence towards God*. And the reason is, because the heart knows that by itself, which nothing in the world besides can give it any *knowledge* of; and without the knowledge of which it can have no foundation to build any true confidence upon. *Conscience*, under God, is the only competent judge of what the soul has done, and what it has not done; what guilt it has contracted, and what it has not: as it is in 1 *Corinth. ii. 1. What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?* Conscience is its own counsellor, the sole master of its own secrets: and it is the privilege
of

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 403

of our nature, that every man should keep the key of his own breast.

Now for the farther prosecution of the words, I shall *do these four things.*

I. I shall shew, how the *heart or conscience* ought to be informed, in order to its founding in us a rational confidence towards God.

II. I shall shew, *how and by what means we* may get it thus informed, and afterwards preserve and keep it so.

III. I shall shew *whence it is* that the testimony of conscience thus informed comes to be so authentick, and so much to be relied upon: And,

IV. And *lastly*, I shall assign *some particular cases or instances*, in which the confidence suggested by it, does most eminently shew and exert itself.

I. And first for the first of these, *how the heart or conscience, &c.* It is certain, that no man can have any such confidence towards God, only because his heart tells him *a lye*; and that it may do so, is altogether as certain. For there is the erroneous, as well as the rightly informed conscience; and if the conscience happens to be deluded, and thereupon to give *false directions* to the will, so that by virtue of those *directions* it is betrayed into a course of sin, sin does not therefore cease to be sin, because a man

committed it *conscientiously*. If conscience comes to be perverted so far, as to bring a man under a persuasion, that it is either lawful, or his duty, *to resist the magistrate, to seize upon his neighbour's just rights or estate, to worship stocks and stones, or to lie, equivocate, and the like*, this will not *absolve* him before God; since error, which is in itself *evil*, can never make another thing *good*. He who does an unwarrantable action, through a false *information*, which *information* he ought not to have believed, cannot in reason *make the guilt of one sin the excuse of another*.

Conscience therefore must be rightly informed, before the testimony of it can be authentick, in what it pronounces concerning the estate of the soul. It must proceed by the two grand rules of *right reason and scripture*; these are the compass which it must steer by. For conscience comes *formally* to oblige, only as it is the messenger of the mind of God to the soul of man; which he has revealed to him, partly by the impression of certain notions and maxims upon the *practical* understanding, and partly by the declared oracles of his word. So far therefore as conscience reports any thing agreeable to, or deducible from these, it is to be hearkened to, as the great conveyer of truth to the soul; but when it reports any thing dissonant

nant

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 405

nant to these, it obliges no more, than the falsehood reported by it.

But since there is none who follows an *erroneous conscience*, but does so, because he thinks it *true*, and moreover thinks it true, because he is persuaded, that it proceeds according to the two forementioned rules of *scripture* and *right reason*; how shall a man be able to satisfy himself, when his conscience is *rightly informed*, and when *possessed with an error*? For to affirm, that the sentence passed by a *rightly informed conscience*, gives a man a rational confidence towards God; but, in the mean time, not to assign any means possible, by which he may know when his conscience is thus *rightly informed*, and *when not*, it must equally bereave him of such a confidence; as placing the condition upon which it depends wholly out of his knowledge.

Here therefore is the knot, here the difficulty, how to state some rule of certainty, by which infallibly to distinguish when the conscience is *right, and to be relied upon*; *when erroneous, and to be distrusted*, in the testimony it gives about the sincerity and safety of a man's spiritual condition.

For the resolution of which, I answer, that it is not necessary for a man to be assured of the *rightness* of his conscience, by such an in-

fallible certainty of persuasion, as amounts to the clearness of a demonstration; but it is sufficient, if he knows it upon grounds of such a convincing probability, as shall exclude all rational grounds of doubting of it. For I cannot think, that *the confidence*, here spoken of, rises so high as to *assurance*. And the reason is, because it is manifestly such a *confidence*, as is common to all sincere christians. Which yet, *assurance*. (we all know) is not.

The truth is, the word in the original, which is *παρρησία*, signifies properly *freedom*, or *boldness of speech*; though *the Latin* translation renders it by *fiducia*, and so corresponds with the *English*, which renders it *confidence*. But whether *fiducia*, or *confidence* reaches the full sense of *παρρησία*, may very well be disputed. However it is certain, that neither the word in the *original*, nor yet in the *translation*, imports *assurance*. For *freedom*, or *boldness of speech*, I am sure, does not; and *fiducia*, or *confidence*, signifies only a man's being actually persuaded of a thing, upon better arguments for it, than any that he can see against it; which he may very well be, and yet not be *assured* of it.

From all which, I conclude; that the *confidence* here mentioned in the text, amounts to no more, than a *rational, well grounded hope*:
such

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 407

such an one, as the apostle tells us, in *Rom.* v. 5. *maketh not ashamed.*

And upon these terms, I affirm, *that such a conscience*, as has employed the utmost of its ability to give itself the best information, and clearest knowledge of its duty, that it can, is a rational ground for a man to build *such a hope upon*; and, consequently, for him to confide in.

There is an *innate light* in every man, discovering to him the first lines of duty, in the common notions of *good and evil*; which by cultivation, and improvement, may be advanced to higher and brighter discoveries. And from hence it is, that the schoolmen and moralists admit not of any *ignorantia juris*, speaking of *natural moral right*, to give excuse to sin. Since all such ignorance is *voluntary*, and therefore culpable; forasmuch as it was in every man's power to have prevented it, by a due improvement of the *light of nature*, and the seeds of moral honesty sown in his heart.

If it be here demanded, whether a man may not remain ignorant of his duty after he has used the *utmost means* to inform himself of it? I answer, that so much of duty as is absolutely necessary to save him, he shall upon the use of such a course come to know; and that which he continues ignorant of, having done the utmost lying in his power, that he might not be

ignorant of it, shall never damn him. Which assertion is proved thus: the gospel damns no body for being ignorant of that which he is not obliged to know; but that, which upon the improvement of a man's utmost power, he cannot know, he is not obliged to know; for that otherwise he would be obliged to an impossibility; since that which is out of the compass of any man's power, is to that man *impossible*.

He therefore who exerts all the powers and faculties of his soul, and plies all means and opportunities in the search of truth, which God has vouchsafed him, may rest upon the judgment of his conscience so informed, as a warrantable guide of those actions, which he must account to God for. And if by following such a guide, he falls into the *ditch*, the *ditch* shall never drown him, or if it should, the man perishes not by his *sin*, but by his *misfortune*. In a word, he who endeavours to know the utmost of his duty that he can, and practises the utmost that he knows, has the equity and goodness of the great God to stand as a mighty wall or rampart between him and damnation, for any errors or infirmities, which the frailty of his condition has invincibly, and therefore *inculpably* exposed him to.

And if a conscience thus qualified and informed, be not the *measure*, by which a man

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 409

may take a true estimate of his absolution before the tribunal of God, all the understanding of human nature cannot find out any ground for the sinner to pitch the soal of his foot upon, or rest his conscience with any assurance, but is left in the plunge of infinite doubts and uncertainties, suspicions and misgivings, both as to the measures of his present duty, and the final issues of his future reward.

Let this *conclusion* therefore stand as the firm result of the foregoing discourse, and the foundation of what is to follow; that such a conscience, as has not been wanting to itself, in endeavouring to get the *utmost* and clearest information about the will of God, that its power, advantages, and opportunities could afford it, is that *internal judge, whose absolution is a rational and sure ground of confidence towards God.* And so I pass to the second thing proposed: which is to shew, *How, and by what means, we may get our heart or conscience thus informed, and afterwards preserve and keep it so.*

In order to which, amongst many things that might be alledged as highly useful, and conducing to this great work, I shall insist upon these four: As,

1. Let a man carefully attend to the *voice* of his *reason*, and all the dictates of natural morality; so as by no means to do any thing contrary

trary to them. For though *reason is not to be relied upon*, as a guide universally sufficient to direct us what to do; yet it is generally *to be relied upon*, and obeyed, where it tells us, what we are *not to do*. It is indeed but a weak and diminutive *light*, compared to *revelation*; but it ought to be no disparagement to a *star*, that it is not a *sun*. Nevertheless, as weak, and as small as it is, it is a *light always* at hand, and though inclosed (as it were) in a dark lantern, may yet be of singular use to prevent many a *foul step*, and to keep us from many a *dangerous fall*. And every man brings such a degree of this light into the world with him; that *though it cannot bring him to heaven*, yet, if he be true to it, it will carry him a great way; indeed so far, that if he follows it faithfully, I doubt not, but he shall meet with *another light*, which shall carry him quite through.

How far it may be improved, is evident from that high and refined morality, which shined forth both in the *lives* and *writings* of some of the ancient heathens, who yet had no other *light* but this, both to *live*, and to *write* by. For how great a man in virtue was *Cato*, of whom the historian gives this glorious character; *Esse, quàm videri bonus, malebat?* And of what an impregnable integrity was *Fabricius*, of whom it was said, that a man might as well attempt

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 411

attempt to turn the sun out of his course, as to bring *Fabricius* to do a base, or a dishonest action? And then for their writings; what admirable things occur in the remains of *Pythagoras*, and the books of *Plato*, and of several other philosophers? Short, I confess, of the rules of christianity, but generally above the lives of christians.

Which being so, ought not the *light of reason* to be look'd upon by us as a rich and a noble talent, and such an one as we must account to God for? For it is certainly from him. It is a ray of divinity darted into the soul. *It is the candle of the Lord*, (as *Solomon* calls it) and God never lights us up a *candle* either to put out, or to sleep by. If it be made conscious to a *work of darkness*, it will not fail to discover and reprove it; and therefore the *checks* of it are to be revered, as the echo of a *voice from heaven*; for, *whatsoever conscience binds here on earth*, will be certainly bound there too; and it were a great vanity to hope, or imagine, that either law or gospel will absolve, what natural conscience condemns. No man ever yet offended his own *conscience*, but first, or last, it was revenged upon him for it. So that it will concern a man to treat this great principle awfully and warily, by still observing what it commands, but especially what it *forbids*: and, if
he

he would have it always a faithful and sincere monitor to him, let him be sure never to turn a *deaf ear to it*; for *not to hear it*, is the way to *silence it*. Let him strictly observe the first stirrings, and intimations; the first hints and whispers of *good and evil*, that pass in his heart; and this will keep conscience so quick and vigilant, and ready to give a man true alarms upon the least approach of his spiritual enemy, that he shall be hardly capable of a great surprise.

On the contrary, if a man accustoms himself to slight or pass over these first motions to good, or shrinkings of his conscience from evil, which originally are as natural to the heart of man, as the *appetites of hunger and thirst* are to the *stomach*; conscience will by degrees grow dull and unconcerned; and, from not *spying out moles*, come at length to over-look *beams*; from carelessness it shall fall into a *slumber*, and from a slumber it shall settle into a deep and long *sleep*; till, at last, perhaps it sleeps itself into a lethargy, and that such an one, that nothing but *bell* and judgment shall be able to awaken it. For long *disuse* of any thing made for action, will in time take away the very use of it. As I have read of one, who having for a disguise, kept one of his eyes a long time covered; when he took off the covering,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 413

vering, found his eye indeed where it was, but his sight was gone. He who would keep his conscience *awake*, must be careful to keep it stirring.

2. Let a man be very *tender*, and regardful of every pious motion and suggestion made by the *spirit of God* to his Heart. I do not hereby go about to establish *enthusiasm*, or such phantastick pretences of intercourse with God, as papists and fanatics (who in most things copy from one another, as well as rail at one another) do usually boast of. But certainly, if the *evil spirit* may, and often does suggest wicked and vile thoughts to the minds of men; as all do, and must grant, and is sufficiently proved from the *devil's putting it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ*, John xiii. 2. and his *filling the heart of Ananias, to lye to the Holy Ghost*, Acts v. 3. it cannot after this, with any colour of reason, be doubted, but that the *Holy Spirit of God*, whose power and influence to good, is much greater than that of the *wicked spirit* to evil, does frequently inject into, and imprint upon the soul many blessed motions and impulses to duty, and many powerful avocations from sin. So that a man shall not only (as the prophet says) *hear a voice behind him*, but also *a voice within him*, telling him which way he ought to go.

For

For doubtless there is something more in those expressions of *being led by the Spirit, and being taught by the Spirit*, and the like, than mere tropes and metaphors; and nothing less is, or can be imported by them, than that God sometimes *speaks* to, and *converses with* the hearts of men, *immediately by himself*: and, happy those, who by thus hearing him speak in a *still voice*, shall prevent his speaking to them in *thunder*.

But you will here ask, perhaps, how we shall distinguish in such motions, which of them proceed immediately from the *Spirit of God*, and which from the conscience? In answer to which, I must confess, that I know no certain mark of discrimination, to distinguish them by; save only in general, that such as proceed immediately from God, use to strike the mind suddenly, and very powerfully. But then I add also, that as the knowledge of this, in point of speculation, is so *nice and difficult*, so (thanks be to God) in point of practice it is not *necessary*. But let a man universally observe, and obey every good motion rising in his heart, knowing that every such motion proceeds from God; either *mediately*, or *immediately*; and that, whether God speaks *immediately* by himself to the conscience, or *mediately* by the conscience to the

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 415

the soul, the authority is the same in both, and the contempt of either is rebellion.

Now the thing which I drive at, under this head of discourse, is to shew, *that as* God is sometimes pleased to address himself in this manner to the hearts of men; so, if the *heart will receive*, and *answer* such motions by a ready and obsequious compliance with them, there is no doubt, but they will both return more frequently, and still more and more powerfully, till at length they produce such a *degree of light* in the conscience, as shall give a man both a clear *sight* of his duty, and a certain *judgment* of his condition.

On the contrary, as all resistance whatsoever of the dictates of conscience, even in the way of natural *efficiency*, brings a kind of hardness and *stupefaction* upon it; so the *resistance* of these *peculiar suggestions of the Spirit*, will cause in it also a *judicial hardness*, which is yet worse than the other: so that God shall withdraw from such an heart, and the *Spirit*, being *grieved*, shall depart, and these *blessed motions* shall cease, and affect and visit it no more. The consequence of which is very terrible; as rendring a man *past feeling*. And the less he feels in this world, the more he shall *be sure* to feel in the next. But,

3. Because

3. Because the *light of natural conscience* is in many things defective and dim, and the *internal voice of God's Spirit*, not always distinguishable, above all, let a man attend to the mind of God, uttered in his *revealed word*: I say, his *revealed word*. By which I do not mean, that mysterious, extraordinary, (and of late so much studied) book called the *Revelation*, and which perhaps, the more it is studied, the less 'tis understood, as generally either finding a man crack'd, or making him so; but I mean those other writings of the *prophets* and *apostles*, which exhibit to us a plain, *sure*, perfect, and intelligible rule; a rule that will neither fail, nor distract such as make use of it. A rule to judge of the two former rules by: for nothing that contradicts the *revealed word of God* is either the voice of *right reason*, or of the *Spirit of God*; nor is it possible that it should be so, without God's contradicting himself.

And therefore we see, what high elogies are given to the *written word*, by the inspired penmen of both *testaments*: *it giveth understanding to the simple*, says *David* in *Psalms* cxix. 130. And that, you will say, is no such easy matter to do.

It is able to *make the man of God perfect*, (says *St. Paul*, 2 *Tim.* iii. 17.) *It is quick and powerful,*

Serm. 11: *Measures of Conscience.* 417

powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, Heb. iv. 12. Now what a force and fulness, what a vigour and emphasis is there in all these expressions? Enough (one would think) to recommend and endear the scriptures even to the papists themselves. For if (as the text says) *they give understanding to the simple*; I know none more concerned to read and study them, than their popes.

Wherefore since the *light* and energy of the *written word* is so mighty, let a man bring and hold his conscience to this steady rule: the unalterable rectitude of which, will infallibly discover the *rectitude* or *obliquity* of whatsoever it is applied to. We shall find it a *rule*, both to instruct us what *to do*, and to assure us in what *we have done*. For though *natural conscience* ought to be listened to, yet it is *revelation* alone that is to be relied upon: *as we* may observe in the works of art, a judicious artist will indeed *use* his *eye*, but he will *trust* only to his *rule*.

There is not any one action whatsoever, which a man *ought to do*, or to *forbear*, but the scripture will give him a clear precept, or prohibition for it.

So that if a man will commit such rules to his memory, and stock his mind with portions of scripture answerable to all the heads of duty and practice, his conscience can never be at a loss, either for a direction of his actions, or an answer to a temptation: it was the very course which our Saviour himself took, when the devil plied him with temptation upon temptation: still he had a *suitable scripture* ready to repel and baffle them all, one after another; every pertinent text urged home being a direct stab to a temptation.

Let a man therefore consider, and recount with himself the several duties and virtues of a christian; such as *temperance, meekness, charity, purity of heart, pardoning of enemies, patience*; (I had almost said, *passive obedience* too, but that such old-fashioned christianity seems as much out of date with some, as *Christ's divinity and satisfaction*) I say, let a man consider these and the like *virtues*, together with the *contrary sins and vices*, that do oppose them; and then, as out of a full armory or magazine, let him furnish his conscience with texts of scripture, particularly enjoining the one, and forbidding, or threatening the other. And yet I do not say, that he should stuff his mind like the *margent* of some authors, with *chapter* and *verse* heaped together, at all adventures; but
only

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 419

only that he should fortify it with some few texts, which are home, and apposite to his case. And a conscience thus supplied, will be like a man armed at all points; and always ready either to receive or to attack his enemy. Otherwise it is not a man's *having arms in his house*; no, nor yet his having courage, and skill to use them; but it is his having them still about him, which must both secure him from being set upon, and defend him when he is.

Accordingly, men must know, that without taking the forementioned course, all that they do in this matter is but lost labour; and that they *read the scriptures* to as little purpose, as *some use to quote them*; much *reading*, being like much *eating*, wholly useless without digestion; and it is impossible for a man to digest his meat, without also retaining it.

Till men get what they read into their *minds*, and fix it in their *memories*, they keep their religion as they use to do their bibles, only in their closet, or carry it in their pocket; and that, you may imagine, must improve and affect the soul, just as much as a man's having plenty of provision only in his stores, will nourish and support his body. When men forget the word heard, or read by them, the *devil is said to steal it out of their hearts*, Luke viii. 12. And for this cause, we do with as much *reason*,

as *propriety of speech*, call the committing of a thing to memory, the *getting it by heart*. For it is the *memory* that must transmit it to the *heart*; and it is in vain to expect, that the heart should keep its hold of any truth, when the memory has let it go.

4. The *fourth* and *last* way, that I shall mention, for the *getting of the conscience rightly informed*, and afterwards *keeping it so*, is frequently and impartially to accompt with it. It is with a man and his conscience, as with one man and another; amongst whom we use to say, that *even reckoning makes lasting friends*; and the way to make reckonings *even*, I am sure, is to make them *often*. Delays in accompts are always suspicious; and bad enough in themselves, but commonly much worse in their cause. For, to *defer* an accompt, is the ready way to *perplex* it; and when it comes to be perplexed and intricate, no man, either as to his temporal or spiritual estate, can know of himself *what he is, or what he has*, or upon what bottom he stands. But the amazing difficulty and greatness of his accompt, will rather terrify than inform him; and keep him from setting heartily about such a task, as he despairs ever to go through with. For, no man willingly begins what he has no hope to finish.

But,

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 421

But, let a man apply to this work, by frequent returns, and short intervals, while the heap is small, and the particulars few, and he will find it easy and conquerable; and his conscience, like a faithful steward, shall give him in a plain, open, and entire account of himself, and hide nothing from him. Whereas we know, if a steward or cashier be suffered to run on from year to year without bringing him to a reckoning, it is odds but such a sottish forbearance will, in time, teach him to shuffle; and strongly tempt him to be a cheat, if not also to make him so: for, as the accompt *runs on*, generally the accomptant *goes backward*.

And for this cause, some judge it advisable for a man to accompt with *his heart* every day; and this no doubt is the best and surest course; for still the *oftener* the *better*. And some prescribe accompting once a week; longer than which it is by no means safe to delay it: for, a man shall find his heart deceitful, and his memory weak, and nature extremely averse from seeking narrowly after that, which it is unwilling to find; and, being found, will assuredly disturb it.

So that upon the whole matter, it is infinitely absurd to think that *conscience* can be kept in order without frequent examination. If a man would have his conscience deal clearly with

him, he must deal severely with it: often *scouring* and cleansing it will make it *bright*; and, when it is so, he may see himself in it: and, if he sees any thing amiss, let this satisfy him, that no man is, or can be, the *worse* for knowing the very *worst* of himself.

On the contrary, if *conscience* by a long neglect of, and dis-acquaintance with itself, comes to contract an inveterate rust or soil, a man may as well expect to see his face in a *mud-wall*, as that such a conscience should give him a true report of his condition; no, it leaves him wholly in the dark as to the greatest concern he has in both worlds. He can neither tell, whether God be his *friend*, or his *enemy*, or rather, he has shrewd cause to suspect him his *enemy*, and cannot possibly know him to be his *friend*: and this being his case, he must live in ignorance, and die in ignorance; and it will be hard for a man to die *in it*, without dying *for it* too.

And now, what a *wretched* condition must that man needs be in, whose heart is in such a confusion, such darkness, and such a settled blindness, that it shall not be able to tell him so much as one true word of himself? *Flatter* him it may (I confess, as those are generally good at *flattering*, who are good for nothing else;) but, in the mean time, the poor man is left under the fatal necessity of a remediless delu-

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 423

delusion: for, in judging of a man's self, if conscience either cannot or will not inform him, there is a certain thing called *self-love*, that will be sure to deceive him. And thus I have shewn, in four several particulars, *what is to be done*, both for the getting and keeping of the conscience, so informed, as that it may be able to give us a rational *confidence towards God*. As,

1. That the *voice* of reason, in all the dictates of *natural morality*, ought carefully to be attended to by a strict observance of what it *commands*, but especially of what it *forbids*.

2. That every pious motion from *the spirit of God* ought tenderly to be cherished, and by no means checked or *quenched* either by resistance or neglect.

3. That conscience is to be kept close to the rule of the written word.

4. And *lastly*, that it is frequently to be examined, and severely accounted with.

And, I doubt not, but a conscience thus disciplined, shall give a man such a faithful account of himself, as shall never shame, nor lurch the confidence, which he shall take up from it.

Nevertheless, to prevent all mistakes in so critical a case, and so high a concern, I shall close up the foregoing particulars with this *two-fold caution*.

First, Let no man *think*, that every *doubting* or *mis-giving* about the safety of his spiritual estate, overthrows the *confidence hitherto spoken of*. For (as I shewed before) the *confidence* mentioned in the text, is not properly *assurance*, but only a *rational, well-grounded hope*; and therefore may very well consist with some returns of *doubting*. For, we know, in that pious and excellent *confession* and *prayer*, made by the poor man to our Saviour, in *Mark ix. 24.* how in the very same breath, in which he says, *Lord, I believe*; he says also, *Lord, help my unbelief*. So that we see here, that the sincerity of our faith or confidence will not secure us against all vicissitudes of wavering or distrust; indeed, no more than a strong athletick constitution of body will secure a man always against heats and colds, and rheums, and such like *indispositions*.

And one great reason of this, is; Because such a faith or confidence as we have been treating of, resides in the soul or conscience, as an *habit*; and *habits*, we know, are by no means either inconsistent with, or destroyed by every contrary *act*. But especially, in the case now before us, where the truth and strength of our *confidence towards God* does not consist so much, in the *present act*, by which it exerts itself, no, nor yet in the *habit* producing this act; as it does

Serm. 11. *Measures of Conscience.* 425

does in the *ground* or *reason*, which this confidence is *built upon*; which being the *standing sincerity of a man's heart*, though the present *act* be interrupted, (as, no doubt, through *infirmit*y, or *temptation*, it may be very often;) yet, so long as *that sincerity*, upon which this confidence was first founded, does continue, as soon as the *temptation* is removed and gone, the fore-mentioned *faith* or *affiance* will, by renewed, vigorous and fresh acts, recover and exert itself, and with great comfort and satisfaction of mind, give a man *confidence towards God*. Which, though it be indeed a lower and a lesser thing than *assurance*, yet, as to all the purposes of a pious life, may, for ought I see, prove much more useful; as both affording a man *due comfort*, and yet leaving room for *due caution* too; which are two of the principal uses that religion serves for, in this *world*.

2. The other *caution*, with reference to the foregoing discourse, is this: *Let no man*, from what has been said, reckon a *bare silence of conscience*, in not *accusing* or *disturbing* him, a sufficient argument for *confidence towards God*. For, such a *silence* is so far from being always so, that it is usually worse than the fiercest and loudest *accusations*; since it may, and for the most part does, proceed from a kind of *numbness*, or stupidity of *conscience*; and an absolute domi-

dominion obtained by sin over the soul; so that it shall not so much as *dare to complain, or make a stir*. For, as our Saviour says, *Luke xi. 21. while the strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace*: so, while sin rules and governs with a strong hand, and has wholly subdued the conscience to a slavish subjection to its tyrannical yoke, the soul *shall be at peace*, such a false *peace* as it is; but for that very cause *worse* a great deal, and more destructive, than when by continual alarms and assaults it gives a man neither peace nor truce, quiet nor intermission. And therefore it is very remarkable, that the text expresses the sound estate of the heart or the conscience, here spoken of, not barely by its *not accusing*, but by its *not condemning* us; which word imports properly an acquitment, or discharge of a man upon some precedent *accusation*, and a *full trial and cognizance of his cause* had thereupon. For as *condemnation* being a *law-term*, and so relating to the judicial proceedings of *law-courts*, must still pre-suppose an hearing of the cause, before any sentence can pass; so likewise in the *court of conscience*, there must be a strict and impartial enquiry into all a man's actions, and a thorough hearing of all that can be pleaded for and against him, before conscience can rationally either *condemn*, or *discharge him*: and if, indeed,

Serm. 11: *Measures of Conscience.* 417

deed, upon such a fair and full trial he can come off, he is then *rectus in curiâ*, clear and *innocent*, and consequently may reap all that satisfaction from himself, which it is natural for *innocence* to afford the person who has it. I do not here speak of a *legal innocence*, (none but sots and quakers dream of such things;) for, as St. Paul says, *Galat. ii. 16. By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified:* but I speak of an *evangelical innocence*; such an one as the oeconomy of the gospel accepts, whatsoever the law enjoins; and though mingled with several infirmities and defects, yet amounts to such a pitch of righteousness, as we call *sincerity*. And whosoever has this, shall never be damned for want of the other.

And now, how vastly does it concern all those, who shall think it worth their while to be in earnest with their immortal souls, not to abuse and delude themselves with a false confidence? A thing so easily taken up, and so hardly laid down. Let no man conclude, because his conscience *says nothing to him*, that therefore it *has nothing to say*. Possibly some never so much as doubted of the safety of their spiritual estate in all their lives; and if so let them not flatter themselves, but rest assured, that they have so much the more reason a great deal to doubt of it now: for the causes of such a profound *stillness*,

ness, are generally gross ignorance, or long custom of sinning, or both; and these are very dreadful symptoms indeed, to such as are not *hell and damnation-proof*. When a man's wounds cease to *smart*, only because he has lost his *feeling*, they are never the less *mortal* for his not seeing his need of a *chirurgion*. It is not mere, actual, present ease, but ease after pain, which brings the most durable and solid comfort. Acquittance before trial can be no security. *Great and strong calms* usually portend, and go before the most violent *storms*. And therefore, since *storms* and *calms* (especially with reference to the state of the soul) do always follow one another; certainly, of the two, it is much more eligible to have the *storm first*, and the *calm afterwards*: since a calm before a storm is commonly a peace of a man's own making; but a *calm after a storm* a peace of God's.

To which God, who only can speak such peace to us, as neither the world nor the devil shall be able to take from us, be render'd and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience:

A

S E R M O N

ON THE

Preceding Subject;

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY

A T

CHRIST-CHURCH, *Oxon.*

October 30. 1692.

SERMON XII

OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY THE REV. J. H. B. B. B.

PREACHED AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

ON SUNDAY, MAY 10, 1858

AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BY THE REV. J. H. B. B. B.

OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

ON SUNDAY, MAY 10, 1858

AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BY THE REV. J. H. B. B. B.

SERMON XII.

On the preceding Subject; viz.

Of the Nature and Measures of Conscience.

I JOHN iii. 21.

*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we
have confidence towards God.*

I HAVE discoursed once already upon these words in this place. In which discourse, after I had set down *four several false grounds*, upon which, men, in judging of the safety of their spiritual estate, were apt to *found a wrong confidence towards God*, and shewn the falsity of them all: and, that there was nothing but *a man's own heart or conscience*, which, in this great concern, he could with any safety rely upon; I did, in the next place, cast the
farther

farther prosecution of the words under these *four following particulars.*

I. To shew, *how the heart or conscience* ought to be informed, in order to its founding in us a rational confidence towards God.

II. To shew, *how, and by what means* we may get our conscience thus informed, and afterwards preserve and keep it so.

III. To shew, *whence it is*, that the testimony of conscience, thus informed, comes to be so authentick, and so much to be relied upon. And,

IV. And lastly, *to assign some particular cases or instances*, in which the confidence suggested by it, does most eminently shew, and exert itself.

Upon the first of which heads, to wit, *How the heart or conscience ought to be informed, in order to its founding in us a rational confidence towards God*, after I had premised something about an *erroneous conscience*, and shewn, both what *influence* that ought to have upon us, and what *regard* we ought to have to that, in this matter, I gathered the result of all into this one conclusion; namely, *That such a conscience as has not been wanting to itself, in endeavouring the utmost knowledge of its duty, and the clearest information about the will of God, that its power, advantages, and opportunities could afford it,*
is

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 433

is that great internal judge, whose absolution is a rational, and sure ground of confidence towards God. This I then insisted upon at large, and from thence proceed to the

II. Particular; which was to shew, *how, and by what means we might get our conscience thus informed, and afterwards preserve and keep it so.*

Where amongst those many ways and methods, which might, no doubt, have been assigned, as highly conducing to this purpose, I singled out, and insisted upon, only these four. As.

1. That *the voice of reason, in all the dictates of natural morality*, was still carefully to be attended to by a strict observance of what it commanded, but especially, of what it forbad.

2. That *every pious motion from the Spirit of God* was tenderly to be cherished, and by no means quenched or checked, either by resistance or neglect.

3. That conscience was still to be *kept close to the rule of God's written word*; and

4. And lastly, *that it was frequently to be examined, and severely accounted with.*

These things also, I then more fully enlarged upon; and so closed up all with a *double caution*, and that of no small importance as to the case then before us: as,

First, *That no man* should reckon every *doubting or misgiving of his heart*, about the safety of his spiritual estate, inconsistent with that *confidence towards God*, which is here spoken of in the text: and, secondly, *that no man* should account a *bare silence of conscience*, in not *accusing or disturbing him*, a sufficient ground for such a confidence. Of both which I then shew'd the fatal consequence. And so, not to trouble you with any more repetitions than these, which were just and necessary to lay before you the coherence of one thing with another, I shall now proceed to the *third* of those four particulars first propos'd: which was to shew, *Whence it is that the testimony of conscience (concerning a man's spiritual estate) comes to be so authentic, and so much to be relied upon.*

Now the *force and credit* of its testimony stands upon this double ground.

1. The *high office* which it holds immediately from God himself, in the soul of man. And,

2. Those *properties or qualities* which peculiarly fit it for the discharge of this *high office*, in all things relating to the soul.

1. And first, for its *office*. It is no less than *God's viceroy or deputy*, doing all things by immediate commission from him. It commands and dictates every thing in God's name;
and

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 435

and stamps every word with an Almighty authority. So that it is (as it were) a kind of *copy* or *transcript* of the divine sentence, and an interpreter of the sense of heaven. And from hence it is, that *sins against conscience*, (as all *sins against light and conviction* are, by way of eminence, so called) are of so peculiar and transcendent a guilt. For, that every such sin is a daring and direct defiance of the divine authority, as it is signified and reported to a man by his conscience, and thereby ultimately terminates in God himself.

Nay, and this *vicegerent of God* has one *prerogative* above all God's other earthly vicegerents; to wit, that *it can never be deposed*. Such a strange, sacred, and inviolable majesty has God imprinted upon this faculty; not, indeed, as upon *an absolute, independent sovereign*; but yet with so great a communication of something next to sovereignty, that while it keeps within its proper compass, it is controllable by no mortal power upon earth. For, not the greatest monarch in the world can countermand conscience so far, as to make it *condemn*, where it would otherwise *acquit*; or *acquit*, where it would otherwise *condemn*; no, neither *sword* nor *sceptre* can come at it; but it is above and beyond the reach of both.

And if it were not for this awful and majestick character which it bears, whence could it be, that the stoutest and bravest hearts droop and sneak when conscience frowns; and the most abject and afflicted wretch feels an unspeakable, and even triumphant joy, when the *judge within* absolves and applauds him? When a man has done any villainous act, though under countenance of the highest place and power, and under covert of the closest secrecy, his conscience for all that strikes him like a clap of thunder, and depresses him to a perpetual trepidation, horror, and poorness of spirit; so that like *Nero*, though surrounded with his *Roman* legions and *Prætorian* bands, he yet sculks and hides himself, and is ready to fly to every thing for refuge, though he sees nothing to fly from. And all this, because he has heard a condemning sentence from within, which the secret fore-bodings of his mind tell him will be ratified by a sad and certain execution from above: on the other side, what makes a man so chearful, so bright and confident in his comforts, but because he finds himself acquitted by God's *high commissioner* and *deputy*? Which is as much as a pardon under God's own hand, under the *broad seal of heaven* (as I may so express it.) For a king never condemns any whom his judges have absolved, nor absolves whom his judges have

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 437

have condemned, whatsoever the people and republicans may.

Now from this principle; *that the authority of conscience stands founded upon its vicegerency and deputation under God*, several very important inferences may, or rather indeed unavoidably must ensue. Two of which I shall single out and speak of: as,

First, We collect from hence the *absurdity and impertinence*; and,

Secondly, The *impudence and impiety* of most of those *pretences of conscience*, which have born such a *mighty* sway all the world over; and in these poor nations especially.

1. And first, for the *absurdity and impertinence of them*. What a rattle and a noise has this word *conscience* made? How many battles has it fought? How many churches has it robbed, ruin'd and *reform'd* to ashes? How many laws has it *trampled* upon, *dispensed* with, and *addressed* against? And, in a word, how many governments has it over-turned? Such is the mischievous force of a plausible word, applied to a detestable thing.

The allegation, or plea of conscience, ought never to be admitted barely for itself: for when a thing obliges only by a borrowed authority, it is ridiculous to alledge it for its own. Take a *lieutenant*, a *commissioner* or *ambassador* of any

prince; and so far as he represents his prince, all that he does, or declares under that capacity, has the same force and validity, as if actually done, or declared by the prince himself in person: but then how far does this reach? Why, just so far as he keeps close to his *instructions*: but, when he once baulks them, though what he does may be indeed a *publick crime*, or a *national mischief*, yet it is but a *private act*; and the doer of it may chance to pay his head for the presumption. For still, as *great* as the authority of such kind of persons is, it is not founded upon their *own will*, nor upon their *own judgment*, but upon their *commission*.

In like manner, every dictate of this *vicegerent of God*, where it has a *divine word or precept* to back it, carries a *divine authority* with it. But, if no such *word* can be produced, it may indeed be a strong *opinion*, or *persuasion*, but it is not *conscience*: and no one thing in the world has done more mischief, and caused more delusions amongst men, than their not distinguishing between *conscience*, and *mere opinion* or *persuasion*.

Conscience, is a Latin word, (though with an English termination,) and, according to the very notation of it, imports a *double or joint knowledge*; to wit, one of a divine law or rule, and the other of a man's own action: and so

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 439

is properly *the application of a general law, to a particular instance of practice.* The law of God, for example, says, *Thou shalt not steal;* and the mind of man tells him, that the taking of such or such a thing from a person lawfully possessed of it, is *stealing.* Whereupon, the conscience joining the knowledge of both these together, pronounces in the name of God, *that such a particular action ought not to be done.* And this is the true procedure of conscience, always supposing *a law from God,* before it pretends to lay any obligation upon man: for still I averr, that conscience neither is, nor ought to be its own rule.

I question not, I confess, but mere *opinion* or *persuasion* may be every whit as strong, and have as forcible an influence upon a man's actions as *conscience* itself. But then (we know) *strength* or *force* is one thing, and *authority* quite another. As a rogue upon the high-way may have as strong an arm, and take off a man's head as cleverly as the *executioner.* But then there is a vast disparity in the two actions, when one of them is *murther,* and the other *justice:* nay, and our Saviour himself told his disciples, *that men should both kill them, and think that in so doing they did God service.* So that here (we see) was a full *opinion* and *persuasion,* and a very zealous one too, of the high meritori-

ousness of what they did; but still there was no *law*, no *word*, or *command* of God to ground it upon, and consequently it was *not conscience*.

Now the *notion of conscience*, thus stated, if firmly kept to, and thoroughly driven home, would effectually baffle and confound all those senseless, though clamorous pretences, of the *schismatical opposers of the constitutions of our church*. In defence of which, I shall not speak so much as one syllable against the *indulgence and toleration* granted to these men. No, since they have it, let them (in God's name) enjoy it, and the government make the best of it. But since I cannot find that the *law which tolerates* them in their way of worship (and it does no more) does at all *forbid* us to defend ours, it were earnestly to be wished, that all hearty lovers of the church of *England* would assert its excellent constitution more vigorously now than ever: and especially in such congregations as this; in which there are so many young persons, upon the *well or ill principling* of whom (next under God) depends the happiness or misery of this church and state. For, if such should be generally prevailed upon by *hopes or fears*, by *base examples*, by *trimming and time-serving*, (which are but two words for the same thing) to abandon and betray *the church*
of

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 441

of *England*, by nauseating her pious, prudent and wholsom orders, (of which I have seen some scurvy instances) we may rest assured, that this will certainly produce *confusion*, and that *confusion* will as certainly end in *popery*.

And therefore, since the *liturgy*, *rites*, and *ceremonies* of our church, have been, and still are, so much cavilled and struck at, and all upon a plea of *conscience*; it will concern us, as becomes men of sense, seriously to examine the force of this plea; which our adversaries are still setting up against us as the grand pillar and buttress of *the good old cause* of non-conformity. For, come to any dissenting brother, and ask him, Why cannot you communicate with the church of *England*? Oh, (says he) *it is against my conscience; my conscience will not suffer me to pray by a set-form, to kneel at the sacrament, to hear divine service read by one in a surplice; or to use the cross in baptism; or the like.*

Very well; and is this the case then, that it is all *pure conscience* that keeps you from complying with the rule and order of the church in these matters? If so, then produce me some word or law of *God* forbidding these things. For *conscience* never commands or forbids any thing authentically, but there is some law of *God* which commands or forbids it first. *Con-*
science

science (as might be easily shewn) being no distinct power or faculty from the mind of man, but the mind of man itself applying the general rule of God's law to particular cases and actions. This is truly and properly conscience. And therefore shew me such a law; and that either as a necessary dictate of right reason, or a positive injunction in God's revealed word: For these two are all the ways, by which God speaks to men now-a-days; I say, shew me something from hence which countermands or condemns all or any of the fore-mentioned ceremonies of our church, and then I will yield the cause. But if no such reason, no such scripture can be brought to appear in their behalf against us, but that with screwed face, and doleful whine, they only ply you with senseless harangues of conscience, against carnal ordinances, the dead letter, and human inventions on the one hand, and loud out-cries for a farther reformation on the other; then rest you assured, that they have a design upon your pocket, and that the word conscience is used only as an instrument to pick it; and more particularly, as it calls it a farther reformation, signifies no more, with reference to the church, than as if one man should come to another, and say, Sir, I have already taken away your cloak, and do fully intend (if I can) to take away your coat also. This

is

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 443

is the true meaning of this word, *farther reformation*; and so long as you understand it in this sense, you cannot be imposed upon by it.

Well, but if these mighty men at *chapter* and *verse* can produce you no scripture to overthrow our church-ceremonies, I will undertake to produce scripture enough to warrant them; even all those places which *absolutely* enjoin obedience and submission to *lawful* governors in all *not unlawful things*; particularly that in 1 *Pet.* ii. 13. and that in *Heb.* xiii. 17. (of which two places more again presently) together with the other in 1 *Cor.* xiv. last *verse*, enjoining *order* and *decency* in God's worship, and in all things relating to it. And consequently, till these men can prove the *fore-mentioned* things, ordered by our church, to be either intrinsically unlawful, or indecent, I do here affirm, by the authority of the foregoing scriptures, that the use of them, as they stand established amongst us, is necessary; and that all pretences, or pleas of conscience, to the contrary, are nothing but *cant* and *cheat*, *flam* and *delusion*. In a word, the ceremonies of the church of *England* are as necessary as the injunctions of an undoubtedly lawful authority, the practice of the primitive church, and the general rules of decency, determined to particulars of the greatest decency, can make them *necessary*. And I will
not

not for all the world be arraigned at the last and great day for disturbing the church, and disobeying government, and have no better plea for so doing, than what those of the separation were ever yet able to defend themselves by.

But some will here say perhaps; If this be all that you require of us, we both can and do bring you scripture against your church-ceremonies; even that which condemns all *will-worship*, Col. ii. 23. and such other like places. To which I answer, first, that the *will-worship*, forbidden in that scripture, is so termed, not from the *circumstance*, but from the *object* of religious worship; and we readily own, that it is by no means in the church's power to appoint, or chuse, *whom*, or *what* it will worship. But that does not infer, that it is not therefore in the church's power to appoint *how*, and in *what manner* it will worship the true object of religious worship; provided, that in so doing, it observes such rules of decency as are proper, and conducing to that purpose. So that this scripture is wholly irrelative to the case before us; and as impertinently applied to it, as any poor text in the *Revelation* was ever applied to the grave and profound whimsies of some modern interpreters. But, 2. To this objection about *will-worship*, I answer yet farther; that the forementioned ceremonies of the church of
England,

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 445

England, are no *worship*, nor *part of God's worship* at all, nor were ever pretended so to be; and, if they are not so much as *worship*, I am sure, they cannot be *will-worship*. But we own them only for *circumstances, modes, and solemn usages* by which God's worship is orderly and decently performed: I say, we pretend them not to be *parts of divine worship*; but, for all that, to be such things as the divine worship, in some instance or other, cannot be without: for that which neither does, nor can give *vital beat*, may yet be necessary to *preserve it*: and he, who should strip himself of all, that is *no part of himself*, would quickly find, or rather *feel* the inconvenience of such a practice; and have cause to wish for a body as *void of sense*, as such an argument.

Now the consequence in both these cases is perfectly parallel; and if so, you may rest satisfied; that, what is *nonsense* upon a principle of reason, will never be *sense* upon a principle of religion. But as touching the necessity of the aforesaid *usages* in the *church of England*, I shall lay down these *four* propositions.

1. That *circumstantials* in the worship of God (as well as in all other human actions) are so necessary to it, that it cannot possibly be *performed* without them.

2. That

2. That *decency* in the *circumstantials* of God's worship is absolutely necessary.

3. That the *general* rule and precept of *decency* is not capable of being reduced to practice, but as it is exemplified in, and determined to *particular instances*. And,

4. And *lastly*, that there is more of the *general nature of decency* in those particular *usages* and *ceremonies* which the church of *England* has pitched upon, than is, or can be shewn in any other whatsoever.

These things I affirm; and when you have put them all together, let any one give me a solid and sufficient reason for the giving up those few ceremonies of our church, if he can. All the reason that I could ever yet hear alledged by the chief factors for a general introduction of all sorts, sects, and persuasions into our communion, is, that those who separate from us, are stiff and obstinate, and will not submit to the rules and orders of our church, and that therefore they ought to be taken away: which is a goodly *reason* indeed, and every way worthy of the wisdom and integrity of those who alledge it. And to shew that it is so, let it be but transferred from the *ecclesiastical* to the *civil government*, from *church* to *state*; and let all laws be abrogated, which any great or sturdy multitude of men have no mind to submit

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 447

submit to: that is, in other words, let laws be made to *obey*, and not *to be obeyed*; and, upon these terms, I doubt not but you will find that kingdom (or rather that *commonwealth*) finely governed in a short time.

And thus I have shewn the *absurdity*, *folly* and *impertinence* of alledging the *obligation of conscience*, where there is no law or command of God mediate or immediate to found that obligation upon. And yet, as bad as this is, it were well if the bare *absurdity* of these pretences were the worst thing which we had to charge them with. But it is not so. For our second *and next inference* from the foregoing principle of the *vicegerency of conscience under God*, will shew us also the *daring impudence*, and *downright impiety* of many of those *fulsome* pleas of conscience, which the world has been too often, and too scandalously abused by. For a man to sin against his conscience is doubtless a great wickedness. But to make God himself a party in the sin is a much greater: for, this is to plead God's authority against God's very law: which doubles the sin, and adds *blasphemy* to *rebellion*. And yet such things we have seen done amongst us. An horrid, unnatural, civil war raised, and carried on; the purest and most primitively reformed church in the world laid in the dust;
and

and one of the best and most innocent princes that ever sat upon a throne, by a barbarous, unheard-of violence hurried to his grave in a bloody sheet, and not so much as suffered to rest there to this day : and all this by men acting under the most solemn pretences of *conscience*, that hypocrisy perhaps ever yet presumed to out-face the world with.

And are not the *principles* of those wretches still owned, and their *persons* fainted by a race of men of the same stamp, risen up in their stead, the sworn mortal enemies of our church ? And yet, for whose sake, some projectors amongst us have been turning every stone to transform, mangle and degrade its noble constitution to the homely, mechanick model of those *Republican, imperfect churches abroad* : which, instead of being any rule or pattern to us, ought in all reason to receive one *from* us. Nay, and so short-sighted are some in their *politicks*, as not to discern all this while, that it is not the *service*, but the *revenue of our church* which is struck at ; and not any *passages* of our *liturgy*, but the *property of our lands*, which these reformers would have *altered*.

For, I am sure, no other *alteration* will satisfy *dissenting consciences* ; no, nor this neither, very long, without an utter abolition of all that looks like order or government in the church.

And

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 449

And this we may be sure of, if we do but consider both the inveterate malice of the *Romish party*, which sets these silly, unthinking tools a-work, and withal that monstrous principle, or maxim, which those who divide from us (at least most of them) *roundly* profess, avow, and govern their consciences by. Namely, *That in all matters that concern religion, or the church, though a thing or action be never so indifferent or lawful in itself; yet if it be commanded or enjoined by the government either civil or ecclesiastical, it becomes ipso facto, by being so commanded, utterly unlawful, and such as they can, by no means, with good conscience comply with.*

Which one detestable *tenet*, or proposition, carrying in it the very *quintessence* and *vital spirit* of all non-conformity, absolutely cashier and cuts off all church government at one stroke; and is withal such an insolent, audacious defiance of almighty God, under the mask of *conscience*, as perhaps none in former ages, who so much as wore the name of christians, ever arrived to, or made profession of.

For, to resume the scriptures afore-quoted by us; and particularly that in 1 *Pet.* ii. 13. *Submit your selves to every ordinance of man*, says the Spirit of God, speaking by that apostle. But say these men; if the *ordinance of man* en-

joins you the practice of any thing with reference to *religion* or the *church*, (though never so lawful in itself) you cannot with a *good conscience submit to the ordinance of man in that case*: that is, in other words, God says, *they must submit*; and they say, *they must not*.

Again, in the fore-mentioned *Heb. xiii. 17.* the apostle bids them (and in them, all christians whatsoever) *to obey those who have the rule over them*; speaking there of church-rulers; for he tells them, *that they were such as watched for their souls*. But, says the *separatist*, if those *who have the rule over you*, should command you any thing about *church affairs*, you cannot, you *ought not*, in *conscience*, to obey them; forasmuch as according to that *grand principle* of theirs, newly specified by us; every such command makes obedience to a thing otherwise lawful to become unlawful; and consequently, upon the same principle, *rulers must not, cannot be obeyed*: unless we could imagine, that there *may be* such a thing as *obedience* on the one side, where there *must be* no such thing as a *command* on the other; which would make pleasant sense of it indeed, and fit for none but a *dissenting reason*, as well as *conscience*, to assert. For, though these men have given the world too many terrible proofs of their own example, that there may be *commands*, and no
obedi-

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 451

obedience; yet, I believe, it will put their *little logick* hard to it, to prove, that there can be any *obedience*, where *there is no command*. And therefore, it unanswerably follows, that the abettors of the fore-mentioned principles plead *conscience* in a direct and bare-faced contradiction to God's express command.

And now, I beseech you, consider with yourselves (for it is no slight matter that I am treating of; I say, consider) what you ought to judge of those insolent, unaccountable boasts of *conscience*, which, like so many *fire-balls* or *mouth-granadoes* (as I may so term them) are every day thrown at our church. The apostle bids us *prove all things*. And will you then take conscience at every turn, upon its own word? upon the forlorn credit of every bold impostor who pleads it? Will you sell your *reason*, your *church*, and your *religion*, and both of them the best in the world, for a *name*? And that a wrested, abused, mis-applied name? *Knaves*, when they design some more than ordinary villainy, never fail to make use of this plea; and it is, because they always find *fools* ready to believe it.

But you will say then, what course must be taken to fence against this imposture? Why truly, the best that I know of, I have told you before; namely, that whensoever you hear any

of these fly, sanctified sycophants, with *turned up eye*, and *shrug of shoulder*, pleading *conscience* for or against any thing, or practice, you would forthwith ask them, *What word of God they have to bottom that judgment of their conscience upon?* Forasmuch as *conscience*, being *God's vicegerent*, was never commissioned by him to govern us in its own name; but must still have some divine *word* or *law* to support and warrant it. And therefore call for such a *word*; and that, either from *scripture* or from *manifest universal reason*; and insist upon it, so as not to be put off without it. And if they can produce you no such thing from either of them, (as they never can) then rest assured, that they are arrant *cheats* and *hypocrites*, and that, for all their big words, the *conscience* of such men is so far from being able to give them any true *confidence towards God*, that it cannot so much as give them confidence towards a wise and good man, no, nor yet towards themselves, who are far from being either.

And thus I have shewn you the *first ground* upon which the *testimony of conscience* (*concerning a man's spiritual estate*) comes to be so *authentick*, and so much to be relied upon; to wit the high office which it holds as *the vicegerent of God himself* in the soul of man: together with the *two grand inferences* drawn from thence

The

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 453

The first of them shewing the *absurdity, folly,* and *impertinence* of pretending *conscience* against any thing, when there is no law of God mediate or immediate against it: and the other setting forth the *intolerable blasphemy and impiety* of pretending *conscience* for any thing, which the known law of God is directly against, and stands in open defiance of.

Proceed we now to the *second ground*, from which *conscience* derives the credit of its testimony in judging of our spiritual estate; and that consists in those *properties and qualities* which so peculiarly fit it for the discharge of its forementioned office, in all things relating to the soul. And these are three.

First, The quickness of its sight.

Secondly, The tenderness of its sense: and,

Thirdly, and *lastly*, Its rigorous and impartial way of giving sentence.

Of each of which in their order. And first, for the *extraordinary quickness and sagacity* of its sight, in spying out every thing, which can any way concern the estate of the soul. As the voice of it (I shew) was as loud as *thunder*; so the sight of it is as piercing and *quick* as lightning. It presently sees the guilt, and looks through all the flaws and blemishes of a sinful action; and on the other side, observes the candidness of a man's very *principles*, the sin-

cerity of his *intentions*, and the whole carriage of every circumstance in a virtuous performance. So strict and accurate is this spiritual inquisition.

Upon which account it is, that there is no such thing, as perfect *secrecy*, to encourage a rational mind to the perpetration of any base action. For a man must first extinguish and put out the *great light within him*, his *conscience*; he must get away from himself, and shake off the *thousand witnesses*, which he always carries about him, before he can be alone. And where there is no solitude, I am sure there can be no secrecy.

'Tis confessed indeed, that a *long*, and a *bold* course of sinning may (as we have shewn elsewhere) very much dim and darken the discerning faculty of conscience. For so the apostle assures us it did with those in *Rom. i. 21.* and the same, no doubt, it does every day; but still so, as to leave such persons, both then and now, many notable *lucid intervals*, sufficient to convince them of their deviations from *reason*, and *natural religion*, and thereby to render them *inexcusable*; and so, in a word, to *stop their mouths*, though not *save their souls*. In *short*, their conscience was not *stark dead*, but under a kind of spiritual apoplexy, or *deliquium*. The *operation* was hindered, but the *faculty*

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 455

culty not destroyed. And now, if conscience be naturally thus apprehensive and sagacious; certainly this ought to be another great ground, over and above its bare *authority*, why we should trust, and rely upon the reports of it. For *knowledge* is still the ground and reason of *trust*; and so much as any one has of discernment, so far he is secured from error and deception, and for that cause fit to be confided in. No witness so much to be credited, as an *eye-witness*. And conscience is like the great eye of the world, the *sun*, always open, always making discoveries. Justly therefore, may we by the light of it take a view of our *condition*.

2. Another *property* or *quality* of conscience, enabling it to judge so truly of our spiritual estate, is the *tenderness of its sense*. For as by the *quickness of its sight*, it directs us what *to do*, or *not to do*; so by this *tenderness of its sense*, it *excuses or accuses us*, as we have done or not done according to those *directions*. And it is altogether as nice, delicate, and tender in *feeling*, as it can be perspicacious, and quick in *seeing*. For conscience (you know) is still called, and accounted the *eye of the soul*: and how troublesome is the least *mote*, or *dust* falling into the eye! And how quickly does it

weep and water upon the least grievance that afflicts it!

And no less exact is the sense which conscience, preserved in its native purity, has of the least sin. For, as *great sins waste*, so *small ones* are enough to wound it; and every wound (you know) is painful, till it festers beyond recovery. As soon as ever sin gives the blow, conscience is the first thing that feels the smart. No sooner does the *poysoned arrow* enter, but that begins to bleed inwardly; *sin* and *sorrow*, the venom of one, and the anguish of the other, being things inseparable.

Conscience, if truly tender, never complains without a cause, though I confess, there is a new-fashioned sort of *tendernefs of conscience*, which always does so. But that is like the *tendernefs* of a bog or quagmire, and it is very dangerous coming near it, for fear of being swallowed up by it. For when conscience has once acquired this *artificial tendernefs*, it will strangely enlarge, or contract its swallow as it pleases; so that sometimes a camel shall slide down with ease, where at other times, even a gnat may chance to stick by the way. It is, indeed, such a kind of *tendernefs*, as makes the person who has it, generally very *tender of obeying the laws*, but never so *of breaking them*. And therefore, since it is commonly at such
vari-

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 457

variance with the *law*, I think the *law* is the fittest thing to deal with it.

In the mean time, let no man deceive himself, or think, that *true tenderness of conscience* is any thing else, but an awful, and exact sense of the *rule*, which should *direct*, and of the *law*, which should *govern* it. And while it steers by this compass, and is sensible of every declination from it, so long it is truly and properly *tender*, and fit to be relied upon, whether it checks or approves a man for what he does. For from hence alone springs its *excusing* or *accusing power*; all accusation, in the very nature of the thing, still supposing, and being founded upon *some law*: for where there is *no law*, there can be *no transgression*; and where there can be *no transgression*, I am sure there ought to be *no accusation*.

And here, when I speak of *law*, I mean, both the *law of God*, and of *man* too. For where the matter of a law is a *thing not evil*, every *law of man* is virtually, and, at a second hand, the *law of God also*. Forasmuch as it binds in the strength of the *divine law*, commanding obedience to *every ordinance of man*; as we have already shewn. And therefore all tenderness of conscience against such laws, is hypocrisy, and patronized by none but men of design, who look upon it as the fittest engine to get into
power

power by; which, by the way, when they are once possessed of, they generally manage with as little *tenderness*, as they do with *conscience*: of which we have had but too much experience already, and it would be but ill venturing upon more.

In a word, *conscience* not acting by and under a *law*, is a boundless, daring, and presumptuous thing: and, for any one by virtue thereof, to challenge to himself a privilege of doing what he will, and of being unaccountable for what he does, is in all reason too much *either for man or angel* to pretend to.

The third and last *property of conscience* which I shall mention, and which makes the *verdict* of it so authentick, is its great and rigorous impartiality. For, as its wonderful apprehensiveness made that it could not easily *be deceived*, so this makes that it will by no means *deceive*. A *judge*, you know, may be skilful in understanding a cause, and yet partial in giving sentence. But it is much otherwise with conscience; no artifice can induce it to accuse the innocent, or to absolve the guilty. No, we may as well bribe the light and the day to represent white things black, or black white.

What pitiful things are power, rhetorick, or riches, when they would *terrify*, *dissuade*, or *buy off* conscience from pronouncing sentence
accord-

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 459

according to the merit of a man's actions! For still (as we have shewn) *conscience is a copy of the divine law*; and though judges may be bribed, or frightned, yet *law* cannot. The *law* is impartial and inflexible; it has no passions or affections; and consequently never *accepts persons*, nor *dispenses with itself*.

For let the most potent sinner upon earth speak out, and tell us, whether he can command down the clamours and revilings of a guilty conscience, and impose silence upon that bold reprover. He may perhaps for a while put on an high and a big look; but can he, for all that, look conscience out of countenance? And he may also dissemble a little forced jollity, that is, he may court his mistress, and quaff his cups, and perhaps sprinkle them now and then with a few *damme's*; but who in the mean time, besides his own wretched miserable self, knows of those secret, bitter infusions, which that terrible thing, called *conscience*, makes into all his draughts? Believe it, most of the appearing mirth in the world is not *mirth*, but *art*. The wounded spirit is not seen, but walks under a disguise; and still the less you see of it, the better it looks.

On the contrary, if we consider the virtuous person, let him declare freely, whether ever his conscience checked him for his innocence, or
upbraided

upbraided him for an action of duty; did it ever bestow any of its hidden lashes, or concealed bites on a mind severely pure, chaste, and religious?

But when conscience shall *complain, cry out and recoil*, let a man descend into himself with too just a suspicion, that all is not right within. For surely that *bue-and-cry* was not raised upon him for nothing. The spoils of a rifled innocence are born away, and the man has stolen something from his own soul, for which he ought to be pursued, and will at last certainly be overtook.

Let every one therefore attend the sentence of his conscience: for he may be sure, it will not daub, nor flatter. It is as severe *as law*, as impartial *as truth*. It will neither conceal, nor pervert what it knows.

And thus I have done with the third of those four particulars at first proposed, and shewn *whence, and upon what account it is, that the testimony of conscience (concerning our spiritual estate) comes to be so authentick, and so much to be relied upon*: namely, for that it is fully impowered and *commissioned* to this great office by God himself; and withal, that it is extremely *quick-sighted to apprehend and discern*; and moreover very *tender and sensible* of every thing that concerns the soul. And, lastly, that
it

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 461

it is most *exactly and severely impartial* in judging of whatsoever comes before it. Every one of which qualifications justly contributes to the credit and authority of the sentence which shall be passed by it. And so we are at length arrived at the *fourth and last thing* proposed from the words; *which was to assign some particular cases, or instances, in which this confidence towards God, suggested by a rightly informed conscience, does most eminently shew and exert itself.*

I shall mention three.

I. In our addresses to God *by prayer*. When a man shall presume to come and place himself in the presence of the great *Searcher of hearts*, and to ask something of him, while his conscience is all the while smiting him on the face, and telling him what a rebel and traitor he is to the Majesty which he supplicates; surely such an one should think with himself, that the God whom he prays to, is *greater than his conscience*, and pierces into all the filth and baseness of his heart with a much clearer, and more severe inspection. And if so, will he not likewise resent the provocation more deeply, and revenge it upon him more terribly, if repentance does not divert the blow? Every such prayer is big with impiety and contradiction, and makes as odious a noise in the ears of God,

as

as the harangues of one of those rebel fasts, or humiliations in the year *forty one*; invoking the blessings of heaven upon such actions and designs as nothing but hell could reward.

One of the most peculiar qualifications of an heart rightly disposed for prayer, is a well-grounded confidence of a man's fitness for that duty. In *Heb. x. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith*, says the apostle. But whence must this assurance spring? Why, we are told in the very next words of the same verse; *having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*: otherwise the voice of an impure conscience will cry much louder than our prayers, and speak more effectually against us, than these can intercede for us.

And now, if prayer be the *great conduit of mercy*, by which the blessings of heaven are derived upon the creature, and the noble instrument of converse between God, and the soul, then surely that which renders it ineffectual and loathsome to God, must needs be of the most mischievous and destructive consequence to mankind imaginable; and consequently to be removed with all that earnestness and concern, with which a man would rid himself of a plague, or a mortal infection. For it taints and pollutes every prayer; it turns an *oblation* into an *affront*, and the odours of a sacrifice
into

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 463

into the exhalations of a carcass. And in a word makes the *heavens over us brass*, denying all passage, either to *descending mercies*, or *ascending petitions*.

But on the other side, when a man's breast is clear, and the same heart which endites, does also encourage his prayer, when his innocence pushes on the attempt, and vouches the success; such an one goes boldly to the throne of grace, and his *boldness* is not greater than his *welcome*. God recognizes the voice of his own *spirit* interceding within him; and his prayers are not only *followed*, but even *prevented* with an answer.

2. *A second instance*, in which this confidence towards God does so remarkably shew itself, is at the *time of some notable trial, or sharp affliction*. When a man's friends shall desert him, his relations disown him, and all dependencies fail him, and, in a word, the whole world frown upon him, certainly it will then be of some moment to *have a friend in the court of conscience*, which shall (as it were) buoy up his sinking spirits, and speak greater things for him than all these together can declaim against him.

For it is most certain, that no height of *honour*, nor affluence of *fortune* can keep a man from being miserable, nor indeed contemptible,
when

when an enraged conscience shall fly at him, and take him by the throat; so it is also as certain, that no temporal adversities can cut off those inward, secret, invisible supplies of comfort, which *conscience* shall pour in upon distressed innocence, in spite and in defiance of all worldly calamities.

Naturalists observe, that when the frost seizes upon wine, they are only the flighter and more waterish parts of it that are subject to be congealed; but still there is a mighty *spirit*, which can retreat into *itself*, and there within its own compass lie secure from the freezing impression of the element round about it. And just so it is with *the spirit of a man*, while a *good conscience* makes it firm and impenetrable. An outward affliction can no more benumb or quell it, than a blast of wind can freeze up the blood in a man's veins, or a little shower of rain soak into his heart, and there quench the principle of life itself.

Take the two greatest instances of misery, which, I think, are incident to human nature; to wit, *poverty* and *shame*, and I dare oppose *conscience* to them both.

And first for *poverty*. Suppose a man stripped of all, driven out of house and home, and perhaps out of his country too, (which having, within our memory, happened to so many,
may

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 465

may too easily, God knows, be supposed again); yet if his conscience shall tell him, that it was not for any *failure* in his own duty, but from the *success* of another's villainy, that all this be-fel him; why then, his banishment becomes his preferment, his rags his trophies, his nakedness his ornament; and so long as his innocence is his repast, he feasts and banquets upon bread and water. He has disarmed his afflictions, unstrung his miseries; and though he has not the proper happiness of the world, yet he has the greatest that is to be enjoyed in it.

And for this, we might appeal to the experience of those great and good men, who, in the late times of rebellion and confusion, were forced into foreign countries for their unshaken firmness and fidelity to the oppressed cause of majesty and religion, whether their conscience did not, like a *Fidus Achates*, still bear them company, stick close to them, and suggest comfort; even when the causes of comfort were invisible; and in a word, verify that great saying of the apostle in their mouths; *We have nothing, and yet we possess all things.*

For it is not barely a man's abridgment in his external accommodations, which makes him miserable, but when his conscience shall hit him in the teeth, and tell him, that it was his sin, and his folly, which brought him un-

der these abridgments: that his present scanty meals are but the natural effects of his former over-full ones: that it was *his taylor*, and *his cook*, *his fine fashions*, and *his French ragouts*, which sequestred him, and in a word, that he came by his *poverty* as sinfully, as some usually do by their *riches*; and consequently, that Providence treats him with all these severities, not by way of trial, but by way of punishment and revenge. The mind surely, of itself, can feel none of the burnings of a fever; but if my fever be occasioned by a surfeit, and that surfeit caused by my sin, it is that which adds fuel to the fiery *disease*, and *rage* to the distemper.

2. Let us consider also the case of *calumny* and *disgrace*; doubtless, the sting of every reproachful speech is the truth of it; and *to be conscious*, is that which gives an edge and keenness to the invective. Otherwise, when conscience shall *plead not guilty to the charge*, a man entertains it not as an *indictment*, but as a *libel*. He hears all such calumnies with a generous unconcernment; and receiving them at one ear, gives them a free and easy passage through the other: they fall upon him like rain, or hail upon an oiled garment; they may make a noise indeed, but can find no entrance. The very
whispers

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 467

whispers of an acquitting conscience will drown the voice of the loudest slander.

What a long charge of hypocrisy, and many other base things, did *Job's friends* draw up against him! but he regarded it no more than the *dunghil which he sat upon*, while his conscience enabled him to appeal even to God himself, and in spite of calumny to assert, and *hold fast his integrity*.

And did not *Joseph* lie under as black an infamy, as the charge of the highest ingratitude, and the lewdest villainy could fasten upon him? Yet his conscience raised him so much above it, that he scorned so much as to clear himself, or to recriminate the strumpet by a true narrative of the matter. For we read nothing of that in the whole story: such confidence, such greatness of spirit, does a *clear conscience* give a man; always making him more solicitous to *preserve his innocence*, than concern'd to *prove it*. And so we come now to the

3. and *last instance*, in which, above all others, this *confidence towards God* does most eminently shew and exert itself; and that is, at *the time of death*: which surely gives the grand opportunity of trying both the *strength* and *worth* of every principle. When a man shall be just about to quit the stage of this world, to put off his mortality, and to deliver

up his last accounts to God; at which sad time, his memory shall serve him for little else, but to terrify him with a sprightly review of his past life, and his former extravagancies stripped of all their *pleasure*, but retaining their *guilt*: what is it then, that can promise him a fair passage into the other world, or a comfortable appearance before his dreadful Judge, when he is there? Not all the *friends* and *interests*, all the *riches* and *honours* under heaven, can speak so much as a word *for him*, or one word of comfort *to him* in that condition; they may possibly reproach, but they cannot relieve him.

No, at this disconsolate time, when the busy tempter shall be more than usually apt to vex and trouble him, and the pains of a dying body to hinder and discompose him, and the settlement of worldly affairs to disturb and confound him; and, in a word, all things conspire to make his sick-bed grievous and uneasy: nothing can then stand up against all these ruins, and speak *life* in the midst of *death*, but a clear conscience.

And the testimony of that shall make the comforts of heaven descend upon his weary head, like a refreshing dew, or shower upon a parched ground. It shall give him some lively earnest, and secret anticipations of his approaching joy. It shall bid his soul go out of the body undaunt-

Serm. 12. *Measures of Conscience.* 469

undauntedly, and lift up its head with confidence, before saints and angels. Surely the comfort which it conveys at this season is something bigger than the capacities of mortality; mighty, and unspeakable; and not to be understood, till it comes to be felt.

And now, who would not quit all the *pleasures*, and *trash*, and *trifles*, which are apt to captivate the heart of man, and pursue the greatest rigours of piety, and austerities of a good life, to purchase to himself such a conscience, as at the hour of death, when all the friendships of the world shall bid him *adieu*, and the whole creation turn its back upon him, shall dismiss his soul, and close his eyes with that blessed sentence, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?*

For he, whose conscience enables him to look: God in the face, *with confidence* here, shall be sure to see his face also, *with comfort* hereafter.

Which God of his mercy grant to us all: to whom be render'd and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

The END of VOL. II.

BOOKS Printed for H. LINTOT.

AN Abridgment of the Exposition of the Creed. Written by the Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. *John Pearson*, Lord Bishop of *Chester*. By *Thomas Bishop*, D. D. Minister of *St. Mary's* at *Tower-Church* in *Ipswich*.

The Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth; and of all the general Changes which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of all Things. In Four Books, 1. Concerning the Deluge. 2. Concerning Paradise. 3. The Burning of the World. 4. The New Heavens and New Earth. With a Review of the Theory, and of its Proofs; especially in reference to Scripture, as also the Author's Defence of the Work, from the Exceptions of Mr. *Warren*, and the Examination of Mr. *Keill*, and an Ode to the Author by Mr. *Addison*. In Two Volumes.

The Works of the Celebrated and Ancient *English* Poet, *Geoffrey Chaucer*: Carefully compared not only with former Editions of Value, but with many Rare and Antient MSS. from the Collating of which the Text is in a great measure restored and perfected; many Errors and Corruptions that have crept in and continued in all Editions hitherto printed, are amended; and many whole Lines omitted in all the printed Editions, are inserted in their proper Places. Three entire new Tales of this Author in MS. (never yet printed) have been recovered, and are added to this Edition. By which Alterations, Additions and Amendments, this Work is in a Manner become New. A most Useful and Copious Glossary for the better understanding of this Poet than has yet been printed, is added

added at the End. Begun by *John Urry*, late Student of *Christ-Church Oxford*; and compleated by others of that College.

Oratio in Martyrium Regis Caroli, coram Academia Cantabrigiensi, habita in Templo Beatae Mariae tricesimo Die Jan. 1719. à Gulielmo Crowe, Aulae Trinitatis Socio. Editio altera multo emendatior.

Occasional Poems, Translations, Fables, Tales, &c. By William Somerville, Esq;
Dum nihil habemus majus, calamo ludimus. Phæd.

A Dialogue between Timothy and Philatheus. In which the Principles and Projects of a late Whimfical Book, intitl'd, The Rights of the Christian Church, &c. are fairly stated and answered in their Kind: and some Attempts made toward the Discovery of a new way of Reasoning, intirely unknown both to the Antients and Moderns. In Three Volumes.

Remarks on several Parts of Europe; relating chiefly to the History, Antiquities, and Geography of those Countries through which the Author has travelled; as France, the Low-Countries, Lorrain, Alsatia, Germany, Savoy, Tyrol, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Illustrated with a Map, and above forty Copper Plates. In 2 Vols. By John Breval, Esq; late Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge.

An Historical Account of the Heathen Gods and Heroes, necessary for the understanding of the Antient Poets: Being an Improvement of whatever has been written hitherto by the Greek, Latin, French, and English Authors upon that Subject;
for

for the Use of *Westminster*, and all other Schools,
and for the Readers of Mr. *Pope's Homer*, and
English Classicks.

An Institute of the Laws of *England*; or the
Laws of *England* in their natural Order, according
to common Use; published for the Direction of
young Beginners, or Students in the Law, and of
others that desire to have a general Knowledge in
our Common and Statute Laws. In Four Books.
By *Thomas Wood*, LL. D. and Barrister at Law.
The Fifth Edition with Additions.

The Practical Surveyor, or the Art of Land
Measuring made Easy; shewing by plain and fa-
miliar Rules how to Survey any Piece of Land
whatsoever, by the plain Table, Theodolite, or
Circumferentor, or by the Chain only. And how
to Protract, Cast up, Reduce, and Divide the
same: Likewise an easy Method of protracting
Observations made with the Meridian, and how
to cast up the Content of any Plot of Land, by
reducing any Multangular Figure to one Triangle.
To which is added, an Appendix, shewing how
to Draw Buildings, &c. in Perspective, of Level-
ling, and also how to measure Standing Timber.
By *Samuel Wyld*. The Second Edition, corrected
and enlarged by a careful Hand.

Prælectiones Poeticæ in Schola Naturalis Philo-
sophiæ Oxon. habitæ. Auctore *Josepho Trapp*, A. M.
Coll. *Wadb.* Socio, & Prælectore publico Lecturæ
Poeticæ, a Viro Insignissimo Domino *Henrico Birk-
head*, LL. D. Coll. *Omnium Animarum* olim So-
cio, in celeberrima Universitate *Oxonienſi* nuper
fundatæ. Editio tertia, recognita ab Auctore, &
Indice Alphabetico aucta. In 2 Vols.

m d